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Borrowed Fire

HOW A KENTUCKY MOUNTAIN FEUD CAME TO NEW ENGLAND

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MORE than the dignity of the words themselves, hallowed as they are by a long solemnity, sounded in the rich quality of the bishop's voice as he let a little margin of silence fall before and after his syllables:

"I pronounce you man and wife."

To Cullom Bowes, who stood as near as his post of usher ordained, there was no element of suddenness in the pronouncement. Weeks of dull misery had been for him a sort of novitiate, through which a single thought had run as an unending ache; yet now the sonorous modulation of the prelate's voice struck him with the impact of an unwarned blow.

Until this moment it had been an impending disaster. Now it was one present and accomplished. Now in all the spaces between the poles there was no longer a girl to whom, in the bleak intervals of separation, envelopes could be addressed "Miss

Phyllis Belknap." Now there was only a Mrs. Richard Carson, to whom he would have no reason, in future, for addressing frequent envelopes by any name at all.

Then Cullom Bowes remembered the obligations that his situation imposed, and sought by sheer muscular coercion to regulate his features into decorous calm. Just now, strangely enough, it was the physical aspect of his emotion which most declared itself to consciousness. Had he been on all fours in the boxing ring, with a referee counting slowly over him and an eager adversary crouching ready to battle him down afresh when he came to his feet, his sensations might have been much the same.

Here the rules were less humane than those of the Marquis of Queensberry. Here no count of ten was allowed him before rising to face the future.

So Cullom braced himself and smiled, kissed the bride, and wrung the hand of the

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man who had been his closest friend, and who had now squeezed life dry for him. He even contrived to make his words of congratulation escape banality and ring sincere.

Dick Carson appeared to find words elusive as he sought to respond. His clean-cut face, as he turned from the altar, had held an awed and inarticulate worship, and when he took Cullom's hand his grip had been almost bone-breaking.

Even in his bruised condition of mind the runner-up in the threesome admitted that it hadn't been a falsely played game. He made candid declaration to his sore heart that the winner had played as hard and loved as utterly as himself, and that Phyllis could have chosen no more splendid fellow than this old friend of his who was now victor over him.

Beyond the open windows massed banks of rhododendron were abloom in the grounds of the house which the bride was soon to leave. Cullom shut his eyes, as if to escape the smart of flying splinters, as he turned away his head. Every portion of those gardens and lawns had been a setting for some act of the drama upon which, for him, the bishop's words had called down the curtain. This country place had been his Mecca, and to it he would make no further pilgrimages.

At the bride's table, when the wedding breakfast was served, the loser made a gallant rally. Ahead lay time enough for gloom and solitude. Now, in the light of effervescence of merriment, he tossed about the bubbles of talk and laughter more vivaciously than any other.

When they had risen from the table to separate and drift into groups, and when Cullom was lighting his cigarette by the sundial in the sunken garden, he felt upon him a pair of eyes that were at first silently amused, then quietly sympathetic. He knew that the man to whom the eyes belonged had caught something of the feeling that underlay his assumption of gayety. In recognition of this, the usher made a conscious effort to steady the fingers that held a flaring match, and nodded to his chance companion. This other with whom he found himself standing was the best man, and the brother of the groom.

"Something amused you," said the usher. The two were far enough apart from other guests to talk without being overheard. "I wonder if I can guess what it was!"

"I beg your pardon," apologized Joe Carson. "It was rotten if I showed it. It isn't any joke—but your fingers weren't quite steady, and my mind went back to a cigarette I tried to light once. It was while I was waiting for the signal to go over the top—the first time. You probably have memories like that, too."

Bowes gave the affirmation of a nod.

"I wasn't objecting to your amusement," he declared. "I was just wondering if I was making an exhibition of myself to all and sundry, or if your insight happened to be a bit keener than that of the general run."

"It wasn't the former, at all events," the groom's brother assured him. "On the contrary, it was because you so entirely took me in as the bright and merry chap who was the life of the party that when I caught that little revelation just now it was a somewhat amazing discovery. If it makes any difference to you, I'll admit that my smile was about half admiration for a fellow who could take his punishment that way."

"What was your branch of the service?" Bowes was not eager to refight the war, but he was anxious to drift along any conversational current that set away from reefs of personality.

Carson, who understood perfectly, answered in a like spirit.

"My command used to be the old Second Kentucky. You see I'm a bit of a stranger here in the East. I practice law back home."

Bowes raised his brows a bit.

"It seems strange that we should be meeting here for the first time, when I've heard so much about you from Dick. Dick and I have been buddies more or less since freshman days at Harvard. You speak of Kentucky as 'back home,' and I always thought of you as having been transplanted there from here. I should call Dick fairly typical of the environs of Boston—old Massachusetts name, and all that."

The best man smiled quietly. It struck Bowes with a sort of wonderment that Joe Carson should be so undeniably like his brother in one way, and in another so entirely his opposite. Possibly he was even more striking of appearance than Dick, who was himself a fine figure of a man; but he was also graver, more slender and wiry, and in some indefinable way a shade more primitive.

"The Kentucky blood," he heard Joe Carson casually explaining, "is all on the distaff side of the house. Dick always made his home here with father, while I only visited the East from time to time. I lived with mother till she died."

They turned at that, to see the bride, who came toward them, and, laying a hand on each man's elbow, said smilingly:

"I want to take my new brother away and get acquainted with him. Joe, I'm going to show you the presents before the billiard room's opened to the rest. What do you say?"

"I say," he replied, bowing with a smiling touch of ceremony over her hand, "what Solomon said—'Behold, the half has not been told!'"

Left alone, Bowes realized that behind that scrap of explanation of Joe Carson's there lay the hint of a family skeleton. It indicated that the father and mother had divided their lives and apportioned their children, until now, for all their identical pattern of feature and seeming, these brothers were two types lying across the compass range from each other.

Joe Carson, walking at the side of his brother's bride, whom he had seen for the first time to-day, was as proud of his brother's achievement as if he had himself won a distinguished victory from life. For that was how it seemed to him—a victory. Against love a man should count no sacrifice, according to his direct and simple code; but when love pointed the way to a strengthening union, it was like following one's ideals and being led to triumph.

Phyllis had beauty and charm backed by the distinction of station and wealth, as this prominent company of family friends attested. Behind her were traditions that meant something in America and to America. Joe Carson was proud that his brother Dick had won such standing that he came not as one being promoted into this life by marriage, but as an equal in alliance.

Of all that Joe thought only as background, but without background life is a picture of bald contour, flat and graceless. The impression made by the girl herself gave charm enough to the foreground. He had worshiped Dick so loyally that he had questioned the worthiness of the unknown fiancée—of almost any fiancée—and now he was reassured. Had she not been Dick's girl, he smilingly told himself, this meeting

might almost have been, for himself, love at first sight.

II

THE only people in the wainscoted billiard room, to which Phyllis led him, were two quietly dressed men—plain clothes detectives, keeping watch over the long tables freighted with wedding gifts. Recognizing the bride and the best man—or, perhaps, from his strong resemblance, thinking him the groom himself—the two watchers discreetly withdrew and took up their posts outside the room.

"We have fifteen minutes alone," laughed Phyllis, "before these doors are thrown open to all comers."

"It isn't enough," declared the man gallantly; "but it's fifteen minutes more than I deserve—and Dick will grudge them, as he should."

"First," said the bride, "we must look at your own gift. I want to thank you in its actual presence."

But Joe Carson shook his dark head, and the smile on his firm lips was at once grave and whimsical.

"No!" he corrected her. "First I must look at you—drink you in brazenly and deep, since it's a special occasion. I wonder if you'd stand over there in the light from that open window, with the sun on your hair? I wonder if you would?"

The girl flushed prettily, and her violet eyes seemed to take on more vivid accents of light and color; but she moved over and stood where a flood of early summer sun swept in with a breeze that stirred her hair, escaping under its veil. Stationed there, her head and shoulders rose with lissom erectness against the window itself, backed by gorgeous outer masses of rhododendron in flower.

"Rhododendron!" murmured the man, half aloud. "It speaks to me of home. No matter! Tell me, do you wear that regal air every day, or does it go with coronation robes, as it were?"

"If you're going to make sport of me," she chided him, but with twinkling light in her eyes, "I'll desert you at the altar—vicarious but terrible abandonment!"

"Make sport of you? God forbid!" he declared with sincere fervor. "You see it's just that you seem too good to be true, and where Dick's concerned I had to be shown."

"You mean," she smilingly questioned, "that the unknown woman who had snared

Dick was guilty until she proved herself innocent?"

"Something like that, possibly," he admitted. "I can say it now that any sneaking misgiving is so conclusively disposed of. You know how it often works out—many people discover that there isn't much difference between in-laws and outlaws."

About the walls of the room hung half a dozen portraits, all of them old, and none of them painted by those sticky confectioners in pigment whose work stamps its patrons as ignorant of art. To these, when he felt that the directness of his gaze upon her had spent its privilege, Joe Carson idly turned his eyes.

"Those in-laws, at least, don't look like outlaws," he said.

Though he spoke lightly, his voice carried an undernote which intimated a reverence for the traditions of genealogy. The girl was pleased. She, too, had just that restrained touch of ancestor worship which is permissible to a modern and occidental code of ideas.

Abruptly the eyes of the man came to the end of their wanderings, and remained riveted. Out of the massive molding of an old frame a face was looking at him, and the unmoving steadiness of the painted eyes seemed to meet and challenge his own gaze.

Upon that portrait the sun poured with a fullness of illumination that brought out its fine tones and values, declaring the vigor of a palette which time had not weakened, but ripened, and emphasizing the features of a face and the proportions of a figure which held living quality and personality.

It was the likeness of a man tall to sparseness, eagle-eyed and stern of glance. The brush that had painted him had not niggled at fussy details, but had caught in its bold breadth of stroke something of the soul which had animated the flesh. The painter had caught and fixed this vital attribute as surely as he had captured the textile values of his sitter's old-time coat and waistcoat, or the dull glinting of an ancient watch seal. The eyes which appeared to gaze uncompromisingly out of a human skull were full of reliance and of challenge.

The girl had followed her brother-in-law's gaze to this canvas. At first she did not see how he stiffened into abrupt pre-occupation as his living eyes met those that had been long dead, or how the living eyes narrowed and hardened until the color in the young man's face altered and his arms

tensed. It was precisely as if, in a place where he had supposedly walked in the full abundance of life, he had been suddenly confronted by some spirit amazingly emerged from a long-sealed grave.

When she did look back from the canvas, Joe Carson had somewhat commanded himself. His startled look of amazement had been banished, but Carson's features were still set to the questioning gravity of a sudden absorption which effaced the pleasant smile that had just now softened his eyes as mists soften a steep horizon.

Possibly he felt her gaze, for he said:

"That painting looks like a Jewett—yet Jewett painted only in Kentucky."

"It is a Jewett, that portrait," Phyllis assured him. "It's a great-uncle on my mother's side, and my pet ancestor. He crossed the Alleghanies in revolutionary days. He died fighting with Perry in the War of 1812."

Her face brightened with the animation of a favorite topic and a congenial listener. As Joe Carson looked at her, he seemed trying to bring back to his own features the light-hearted smile of a few moments ago—but as vainly as one might seek to coax the quickness of life back to a body which has stiffened in death. His voice came seriously as he inquired:

"What was his name?"

"Powell," answered Phyllis. "John Waters Powell, to be exact; but he was better known by the sobriquet of Fighting Jack Powell."

"Powell!" repeated the man after her; and this time there was a ring in his voice which it was difficult to interpret.

"He's been dead more than a century," added Phyllis, somewhat mystified at the cryptic change in the manner of the man.

Joe nodded, but he said in a low voice, as if talking to himself:

"He died, but he left issue that's gone on—the Powells of the Cumberland."

"And those descendants were my ancestors," she promptly added. "Of course, my life has been spent here. My father's people have lived in or near Boston since before the Revolution, but I have an equal pride in that other root on my mother's side. Sometimes I think it's a greater pride. Those pioneers who pushed westward were men!"

"Did you ever hear of another man who bore the same surname in more recent times—Judson Powell?" Joe Carson put

the question slowly, his eyes going once more toward the portrait and remaining there. "He might have sat for that portrait, except for the difference a century makes in styles of dress."

"Indeed I have heard of him!" The bride's voice thrilled with interest, even with enthusiasm. "I'm proud of him, too. He was a mountain prosecutor in a wild country where the courts were hated. He set his face toward the maintenance of the law, and he fought grimly for a scant wage and for a lofty ideal. The threat of death was always hanging over him, and he never faltered." She paused and shook her head, as if puzzling over the injustices of life. "Yet the world in general would never have heard of Jud Powell if he hadn't been shot down in his own court room. He was murdered by a mob of desperadoes who came to ride rough-shod over the law and set a criminal free!"

The man stood gazing at the picture as the tidal impetus of her narrative swept her on. He held the painted gaze as if it were some challenge of human eyes which it would be shameful to evade.

"And this mountain prosecutor was a kinsman of yours?" he inquired in a low voice.

"Yes—a descendant of that man in the portrait there. Do you blame me for being proud of them both?"

"The Powells," he observed dryly, "are usually proud of the Powells. Do you happen to remember who these—these desperadoes were of whom you speak?"

"The Wileys," she answered promptly. "It was old Abe Wiley who was being tried, and his gang swore he should never hang; so they swept down like Huns and Vandals on the courthouse, and made a shambles of it!" She paused in the absorbed animation of her recital, then added: "Of course it was before my time, but when I was a child I once went to the Eden Musée in New York. You remember the waxwork figures of famous criminals in the chamber of horrors there? Well, I saw an effigy of old Abe Wiley in his death cell, and I shall never forget it, though I didn't know then that the man his henchmen had martyred was my own kinsman. You see why I'm proud, don't you?"

The man's eyes had hardened more and more. Now they were slits of steely coldness as he turned his back on the portrait and faced her.

"It's late to say anything of the sort—to you; but you ask me a direct question, and I have never yet evaded one. I think Jud Powell was a faith breaker. I think he gained his office by fraud and theft and used it as a weapon of personal vengeance. I think he traduced justice and persecuted the helpless." He paused and added slowly: "But then I'm a Wiley who feels and speaks as a Wiley. When they raided that courthouse, the world heard only one side of the story, but I knew the other. I left college and did what I could to help kinsmen who were being hunted down like wild animals. I did it surreptitiously, because the name and color of the law was on the other side, but I've never regretted my course. For those reasons I can hardly join in encomiums upon Jud Powell."

III

FAITH breaker! Dishonest officer of the law! Persecutor of the helpless!

The suddenness of Joe Carson's bitter outburst dazed Phyllis, at first, so that no words came to her except the echoing repetition of her brother-in-law's indictment. She felt as some one who has trustingly brought a friend to lay a tribute on the grave of a dead hero, and who is amazed to hear that friend spill defamation and sacrilege over the mound to which he has been reverently guided.

Then wrath for the enormity of the insult blotted out its details. Just after her marriage to this man's brother, and five minutes after his declaration of unreserved approval, he had not only scoffed at her blood but slandered it!

"I didn't realize," said Phyllis Carson, straighter and statelier in her anger than in her graciousness, "how right you were when you said that in-laws might be out-laws. Judson Powell was no faith breaker. He was a faith keeper with his own conscience—and a hero!"

Joe wheeled to front the portrait again; then he laughed shamefacedly.

"The illusion of that picture is remarkable," he vouchsafed slowly. "I have so much the feeling that it has life—so much the feeling that it's Jud Powell himself in masquerade—that when I think of it, I don't feel safe with my back turned. One isn't afraid to expose his back for an instant to a hero, you know. But I shouldn't have said what I did. You startled me into candor with your direct question, and im-

pulse carried me away. What I have said is both too much and too little—too little, that is, since I've said anything at all."

The bride's eyes held his with uncompromising wrath, and with a withering scorn that seemed to brand him silently as a liar.

"If that's so," she answered crisply, "please amplify your charges. This isn't the sort of thing that I fancied we should have to talk about in cementing our new relationship!"

"Nor I," he responded. "I have accused a dead man whom you revere, and that needs some explaining. The feud between the Powells and the Wileys began out of some remote cause long ago. God only knows what trifle started it. Often we tried to make a permanent peace, and every time it came to nothing because some Powell broke his faith. The culmination was a disgrace, but it wasn't all our disgrace. Twelve years ago a mob of Wileys attacked the court house and took away a prisoner whom the law, so called, was trying under shallow pretenses of justice. In doing that, they killed a prosecutor and a sheriff, they wounded some innocent onlookers, and incidentally they lost some of their own number in dead and wounded."

"And the narrow-minded world," she made withering comment, "instead of admiring their heroism, stood horrified!"

Joe Carson shook his head and went on patiently:

"The narrow-minded world never knew the facts. The Wileys had surrendered old Abe for trial on Judson Powell's solemn assurance that the proceedings should be clean and fair. He lied, as he always lied. It was a travesty, as our people should have known it must be. It was a hypocritical orgy of vengeance. Our enemies in judicial control had sent for State troops to bolster up the farce. We learned all that, and two hours before the militiamen arrived we struck."

"But this was in a court of law!" protested the girl. "Don't the undefiled Wileys allow any sanctity to the law?"

"Not to that law," he asserted bluntly, "which is being used and abused as an instrument of private reprisal. What you outsiders never understand about feudists and courts is this—that one side gains control of legal machinery merely as a means to private ends. Then the sanctity of the law disappears. The word spells nothing unless it spells justice!"

His listener dismissed that brief for the slayers of her hero without reply. Womanlike, she cut away the meshes of generality and made a personal application.

"Then, after all, the clean bill of health you were so good as to give me is withdrawn? After all, you come as an enemy to our wedding—Dick's and mine?"

Joe Carson flinched; then he straightened and shook his head.

"No," he said. "I didn't know when I came, and it's too late now. I let all this slip because you surprised me into saying just enough to need explanation. I shall say no more now. Only—no, that's all," he concluded.

"Only what?" she demanded. "I insist on having the whole of it!"

"Very well! You must forgive me, but my thought was that I couldn't knowingly have broken bread with a Powell. Had I understood before it was too late, I should have opposed this marriage, because history seems to demonstrate that Wiley blood mixes with Powell blood only to the end of disaster."

"Because"—she spoke slowly and with an ominous quiet—"you think the Powells are faith breakers?"

"Because," he corrected her, "I *know* the Powells are faith breakers. But that is all past changing now. Dick is his own man. Doubtless he has seen that portrait and knows its bearing. He needs no mentor in reaching his decisions. Besides, you are a Boston Belknap, far removed from all those wild, implacable enmities. If you were to go to our hills, you would come away with your tidy sensibilities affronted. You would see only crudeness and ignorance. You would turn your back on their life as something distasteful and savage."

"I have been to those hills," she retorted slowly, "and I did not come away affronted. Until I went, I had only the confused idea of the life there that came from old stories filtered through many tellings, and from the misconceptions of fiction written in ignorance."

"And when you had been there?" he inquired gravely.

"When I had been there, I felt that I had been at home. I knew what rugged bigness meant, what character can be, stripped of thin trimmings; what good blood ran in my own veins. And"—her voice leaped—"I knew that the Powells had never been faith breakers!"

"They have never been anything else," he stubbornly reiterated. "If that is your feeling, Dick made a grave mistake in his silence!"

"And the Wileys"—her voice had taken on the bite of scorn again—"the Wileys, I take it, are blameless and noble?"

"You are a Wiley—now," he reminded her. "I've spoken to you of things that might put me in prison if I had mentioned them to any one other than a Wiley. You say I've come as your enemy. Does that look like it? For you, individually, I have only admiration. Had I met you under other circumstances, I think I should have fallen in love with you, but I would never have yielded to it. It's the blood behind you—"

He broke off abruptly, and turned to face the portrait once more. Into his eyes came the eagle fierceness which can only be bred into generations that have nursed on hatred; the fire that smolders on through generations when it has seemed to die, and breaks out afresh when to all appearance it has whitened to ash.

"I'm a fool!" he mused in a low voice. "That's all pushed behind me long ago. It all ended when old Abe went to the electric chair, and we held our hands; and yet—"

He wheeled suddenly to the girl.

"You say you've been there. You know how a man used to go to a neighbor's house, in remote places where matches were unknown, to 'borry fire'? You know how he'd carry home a shovel of living coals to kindle his own hearth? Well, that meant that for decades in those hills—even for generations—fires burned on undying from some original flame teased into being with flint and steel. There's a fire like that in the blood, too, perhaps—not a thing touched thoughtlessly to life with a match, and turned carelessly out with a gas cock, but something enduring, vital, and guarded. That's the fire that burns in Wiley blood—and, as for me, I'm a Wiley to the last drop of mine!"

His voice throbbed. As if its reverberation had been drums sounding some battle call, her pulses leaped in response.

The portrait-hung walls of the room and the velvet formality of the window-framed lawn seemed to recede before the girl's eyes. In their stead she envisioned long outlooks across rugged peaks, where the forests were immensities, and where mists lay over val-

leys flashingly threaded with water. There was rhododendron in that picture, too, but not pruned or tended. It spread in ragged cloaks of lawlessness which the mountain people call "hells."

To the eyes of her imagination, in that strangely stressed moment, the man seemed to change out of his impeccability of dress and manner, and to stand imbued with the remorseless spirit of those hills. As if swept back into some earlier and more primitive incarnation, she heard her own voice speaking, and it seemed the voice of a stranger.

"I am a Powell—a Powell to the last drop of my blood!"

"Then," answered Joe Carson in a voice of stilled foreboding, "God help my brother Dick! But it's too late to talk of that now. I've just heard you make your vows. You made it of your own will and wish—'till death us do part.' For you, at least, the question of loyalty oughtn't to be any dilemma."

His voice seemed to recall her out of a state of trance, and she felt herself trembling. It was as if the words he had answered had been spoken by some one other than herself, and of no volition of her own. Yet the strange tide that had swept her still held her, and the spirit that had spoken through her lips could not be denied or repudiated.

"No, it's not too late," she asserted stoutly. "You say Dick and I are moderns who have nothing more to do with vendetta hatreds than we have with linsey-woolsey and squirrel guns. You seem to ignore the fact that even in civilization happiness can't be based on deceit. I had the right to know who my husband was—to know that my in-laws were outlaws. It was kept from me. There's more to marriage than the formula of the ceremony. That's as far as we've gone yet—and it's as far as I mean to go. Your brother won me on a platform of entire honesty and no secrets, but all the while he was suppressing the truth!"

The violet of her eyes was that of flame burning blue and steady. With a sudden gesture she raised her left hand and gazed at the wedding ring that had circled her finger so short a time. Her lips curled, and her right hand swept over to draw it free, but Joe Carson caught her wrists and held them.

"Stop!" he broke out. His compelling eyes were so close to her own that his

breath struck her cheeks. His voice, stern as it was, had a ring of unwilling admiration. "By God, you're a woman to fight for—or fight with, but you shan't scuttle my brother's life and your own for a whim. I've spoken to you in confidence—"

"Don't be alarmed," she interrupted witheringly, as she met his eyes and gave him a flood of defiance out of her own, even while she was physically as helpless to escape his grasp as if she had been in chains. "I'll keep your secrets. I won't reveal the fact that you rode with a mob of murderers. I won't tell your brother anything—except that you inadvertently let slip who your kinsmen were." She paused, and then her words came quick and passionate: "But I say again that I'm a Powell woman to the last drop of my blood, and that the Powell cause is mine!"

"If you're not a faith breaker like the rest—" he began.

Before he had gone further, he heard the doors open and saw the wedding guests troop across the threshold with a chorus of laughter and chatter that drowned his voice.

Joe Carson dropped the girl's hands and turned, instantly flexing the tautness of his attitude to that of smiling commonplace. Phyllis herself already stood with her back toward the door, and she had the moment she needed to recover her self-mastery.

Then, as Dick Carson, outstripping the wedding guests, reached her side, she swayed slightly and carried her hands to her temples. The color swept out of her cheeks. Standing unsteadily, she groped ahead of her, and would have fallen had not the best man caught her. Her body became limp as he swept her like a child into his arms.

"Give her to me," commanded the bridegroom over his brother's shoulder, his voice a trifle shaken and his eyes tender. "I'll carry her to her room."

IV

CULLOM BOWES had found the fifteen or twenty minutes since Phyllis had gone away on the arm of Joe Carson a purgatorial period during which, for him, time stood still. The determination with which he had nerved himself to see the thing through had carried him thus far with a fairly gallant masquerading of his misery, but his resolution, like an overtaxed storage battery, was growing weak of voltage.

Having observed the decencies of the occasion, he would have preferred to slip away and go to ground like a sore-harried fox in the privacy of his own house; but he had come through the doors of the gift room just in time to see Phyllis sink into unconsciousness. He concluded that the excitement of the eventful day had made her faint, and that there was no cause for any serious alarm; but he could not leave the house until he saw her again with the color restored to her cheeks.

Joe Carson, after surrendering to his brother the slender body he had caught and saved from falling, had turned smilingly back again to the company.

"She had been showing me the presents," he said in response to the collective glance of inquiry that bent itself upon him. "We had been chatting about our families," he added. "You see, when a brother and a sister meet for the first time—"

He broke off with an engaging smile, and the reassured guests relaxed out of attitudes of anxiety to fall into exclamatory groups about the tables upon which gifts were exhibited.

"She's quite all right—you're sure?"

It was Cullom Bowes who inquired, and Carson looked into troubled eyes as again his smile carried reassurance. One felt of the Kentuckian that in a more or less standardized world he had retained individuality of human pattern. He was like a razor-edged thing of steel among silver-bladed and monogrammed table knives.

"I'm all unstrung myself," confessed the usher, "and it makes me fidgety. It wouldn't be so hard for me to pull a faint myself," he added with a doleful smile, as he turned and drifted aimlessly away.

Dick Carson's face, as he came through a side door and laid a hand on his brother's arm, was clouded with foreboding.

"Come with me, Joe," he said nervously. "Let's get away from this chatter."

When the two brothers were alone in a small chamber which was furnished as a sort of writing room, the groom spread his hands in bewilderment and distress.

"I can't make it out," he announced bleakly. "When she first opened her eyes, she looked at me as if she didn't recognize me. Then, when she knew me, she asked me to go away."

Joe Carson's face told no secrets.

"Is she temperamental?" he asked.

"She's high-strung, of course, but as

even and steady as a veteran soldier—a good soldier,” declared the husband. “We were married because we loved each other. Her love was a thing that a man had to win, but when she gave it she gave it wholly. She doesn’t splash over with surface emotionalism, but there are depths of passion in her. She had to fight her family for me, too. They were all for Cullom Bowes. He comes of an old Back Bay family, and he’s the salt of the earth, and a millionaire; but she took me. She fought her family to a standstill, until she forced their unconditional acceptance of me. It wasn’t altogether easy.”

“You are sure of”—Joe Carson hesitated, then brought his question resolutely to its conclusion—“of her love?”

“As sure as I am of God’s goodness!”

“That’s considerable certainty!” The best man spoke a shade dryly. “Yes,” he added, “I should say that’s certainty enough. When she asked you to go away just now, did you go?”

“I couldn’t argue with a girl just coming out of a faint; but there wasn’t any welcome in her eyes. My God, Joe, I’ve lived for this since I’ve known her! Today, when I open the door of my house and she comes through it, I was to enter into a kingdom of happiness—but she must come in smiling!”

“And she didn’t smile?”

“She had opened her lips to speak again when her mother came bustling in. I’ve told you she opposed me. Before her Phyllis wouldn’t have said anything that might seem shaded by the faintest criticism. She declared she was all right, and was going to dress; but it isn’t over, Joe!”

“Dick,” said the brother slowly but steadily, “I guess I spilled the beans. We talked of the Wileys and the Powells.”

“Good God!” groaned the now distracted bridegroom. “I ought to have warned you. That was an inevitable subject, but I’ve steered warily clear of it myself.”

For just a moment the eyes of the best man shot cold jets of light out of narrowed lids. For just a moment, too, his voice became bitingly edged.

“I hadn’t suspected that any of us was avoiding that subject,” he said. “To a Powell,” he had almost added, but those three words he bit off in time.

“No,” answered Dick, his own eyes also unflinching. “I only meant to choose my time. Phyllis had been down there to the

Kentucky hills. She has been in sort of equinox of spirit lately. You see, she did war work overseas, and came back thinking that the world must be sobered and steadied by the ordeal of fire through which it had passed. Instead, she found it, or fancied it, a world jazzed into a sort of nightmare of lunacy, with all its selfishness and sordidness increased and much of its dignity repudiated.”

The bridegroom paused, his brow drawn in soberness of thought.

“In that reaction of spirit she went to the hills, and she thought that there at least something like steadfastness was left in the world. I was willing to give her time to reaccommodate views that were in flux. The whole world’s in much the same restless bewilderment, old man. To us, reared here in a quiet atmosphere of conservatism, old feud animosities could mean nothing, but one must consider the present disquiet of spirit.”

For some moments Joe Carson stood with folded arms, looking out of the window, where the rhododendrons spread their broad, waxen leafage and their rich blooms of white and red. His face, as he stood, was like a promontory of rock over which passed the shadows of storm.

After a little time he wheeled. His face was calm now, and his eyes were lighted with a deep and steady glow of such feeling as that which carried Pythias to the punishment which the Syracusan tyrant had decreed for Damon. He grasped his brother’s hand.

“God bless you, Dick!” he said in a low voice. “God grant you every happiness—home, children, serenity. Love is a better thing than hate. You’ve got it, boy. Don’t let it slip. Hold to it—like a Wiley! Go back to her. Don’t let her talk until you get her home. You’ll win out; but if a fight’s inevitable, pick your battleground. She’s a warrior woman, Dick, for all her soft loveliness. You and she mustn’t argue except under your own roof. God bless you!”

Upstairs in her own room, where her newly initialed traveling bags were packed, the bride was at the staggering center of an emotional vortex. This room had been her own small realm since childhood, reflecting the spirit that was herself. Here she had dreamed through romantic evenings of young girlhood, when the coming of a lover was a matter of gossamer vagueness full of

fright and glory. Here she had pondered the dawning emotions of womanhood, half startled with the consciousness of swelling tides within herself, as she looked out from her window with her lips parted and her eyes as bright as the stars which were her confidants.

Here the discovery had come to her that Dick Carson stood out beyond any confusion of choice. Here, too, she had considered, not without tears, how she might temper to the shorn hopes of Cullom Bowes the chill of her decision—dear old Cullom Bowes, whom she loved, but with whom she was not in love!

This had been her sanctuary when the parental war upon her choice turned the serenity of home happiness into a seeming of persecution, and caused her to feel that she dwelt among enemies. Here she had celebrated her victory of a tardily won consent. Here, from dressing table and bedside stand, there looked out at her the photographed eyes of the man she had just married.

Last night she had knelt at that bedside and prayed, tremulous with happiness and timidity, that she might make Dick Carson's life as happy as she knew her own would be. She looked critically at herself in the long pier glass, admitting her beauty, and modestly proud of it because it was her gift to him.

Now she could realize only that a monstrous and threatening cloud had risen from nowhere and darkened the whole sky of her future. The man whose truthfulness was her religion had lied to her by his silence. She could not think that this deceit was a trivial one, and not conceived in actual dishonesty. She saw only that the cornerstone of their love had been the single principle of complete honesty between them, with no secrets and no deceptions.

It had perhaps been an honesty which Victorian standards would have called too candid, for they had dared to look life in the face together and to discuss it in its marital bearings and principles; but they had pledged themselves to it as their gospel. Now she had found, by an accident of conversation, that in her husband this adherence had been not fundamental, but of the surface. He had let her talk like a prattling child full of ardent enthusiasm about the mortal enemies of his people, and he had not dared to reveal his relationship. In his silence she could see only a staggering

deceit that rocked the corners of her faith—and without solidly based corners what structure could endure?

By Boston standards, perhaps, relationship with a mountain feud might be dismissed as a remote triviality; but he had not regarded it so, or he would have spoken of it lightly. He had treated it as dangerous enough to secrete, and as a threat to their happiness it was as big as he thought it. The roadway down the future seemed full of threats of dishonesties and concealments, for idealism is easily wounded.

To let the matter wait for later adjustment would not do. A wrong start is an assured failure. Their marriage could be no marriage until the ground lay clear between them. Here and now, as she had threatened in her brief and stormy talk with Joe, she must repudiate a partnership based on falsity. But how?

The presence of her mother in the room—the mother whose tardy consent had been granted rather of necessity than of her own will—held her to the present need of concealing her new doubt and terror. That perfunctory consent would not even now bar back from the eloquence of eyes and tone the reminder which might not be put into words:

"I warned you, you know!"

Phyllis was leaving the parental home, which looked upon her going with misgivings, for the house of a husband with whom she had to fight a battle—a battle that was the survival of generations of war, which had never come into any port of enduring peace; but before these people she could not make any hostile move. As she suffered her mother to remove her veil and wedding gown and undress her, her brain reeled in bewilderment.

She stood in the ribboned sheerness of slip and stockings, raising no hand to help them, while her mother and two or three bridesmaids brought walking shoes and traveling clothes and put them on her. All the while they chattered of what a charming wedding it had been, and how well such an auspicious launching boded for the voyage of marriage.

She let them dress her in listless silence. When it was done, she found herself descending the stairs like a sleep walker. She saw Dick Carson standing eagerly at their foot, awaiting her, with his brother at his elbow. She caught a forced smile on the suddenly drawn face of Cullom Bowes—

who had never lied to her by implication of silence. She paused like an automaton to toss downward the bride's bouquet.

But the flair of the actress, which lies deep rooted in a woman's self-defensive instinct, sustained her, and her smile was as radiant as it was shallow. Her violet eyes belied with their brightness the numb heaviness of her heart, and through the shower of rice she ran into the outstretched arms of her husband with a pretty little exclamation of weakness seeking refuge in strength.

V

It was Cullom Bowes who drove her father's sedan, outrageously decorated and camouflaged with fake luggage, to the porte cochère, drawing the fire of attention there, while Joe Carson slipped with the bride and groom through a servants' entry and led them to the rear of the garage, where Dick's own car waited for them with the motor running.

The bride's father and mother had been admitted to the secret of the flight from the rice-throwing mob, and a chauffeur had been seduced by the persuasion of clever society reporters; so that as Phyllis stood by the open door of the machine, she realized that a newspaper camera was being trained upon her.

There, with her foot on the running board, the girl suddenly stiffened. She looked into the eyes of her husband for a moment, and her spirit steeled itself for combat, while the color ebbed from her cheeks. It was such desperation as comes into the eyes of a prisoner with the futile impulse to bolt.

Joe Carson read her expression with a surety of diagnosis.

"Permit me," he said deferentially, taking her elbow and bowing as he lifted her into the car.

No one but herself knew that that gentle pressure of his hand had under its softness a reserve of strength that she could not have broken.

Virtually forced into the car, Phyllis turned her face and met Joe's eyes with an agonized flash of baffled hatred; but he sustained it steadily, gravely, even courteously. Behind his disciplined quiet, however, she caught again the granite quality of crags against which hurricanes may whip themselves to vaporous puffs. For an instant she half rose; then she remembered

the presence of her parents and the focusing of the camera. It was not the time!

Dick Carson swung himself in beside her and closed the door, and his brother's order sounded crisply to the driver:

"Go on!"

With a sense of helplessness and dizziness, the girl sank back against the cushions and closed her eyes. It seemed to her that speech involved an insuperable effort, that life had become grotesquely unreal, and that the man sitting at her side was a captor with whom no plea for mercy would prove availing.

Yet this was the man of whom she had prayed and dreamed last night, wishing that his arms held her. This was the drive to which, last night, she had looked forward as her progress to the gates of fulfillment. Now, as she felt his hand close over hers, she caught her own away sharply, gasping.

"Dearest!" he pleaded in a stricken voice of bewilderment. "Can't you see that whatever it is, it can't be worth this misunderstanding between us? This is a moment we can never recapture in all life—it's our beginning together." Slowly and earnestly he added: "It's what I've built for, dreamed of, lived toward. It has made me feel more victorious than a Cæsar and prouder than a Tarquin!"

She did not answer him, but flinched and closed her eyes as if the words hurt her. After a moment the man went on, his utterance shaken by the tremulousness of an unaccustomed agitation.

"Our hearts brought us together. Though I knew you were giving far more than you were getting, I knew, too, that it was of your own free will. Now, at this wonderful time, for God's sake, Phyllis dear, don't let a trifle kill the first bloom of our happiness!"

There was a long silence, except for the composed purr of the engine; but at last Carson heard her voice, low and tone-flat, saying:

"It isn't a trifle unless you call shipwreck a trifle."

"Shipwreck!" he echoed incredulously. "What could shipwreck us between the ceremony and our own house? Joe told me that you and he talked of the old feud, but that doesn't touch us—can't touch us, so long as we are sane."

"And what else did Joe tell you?" she inquired.

"That's about all—that you spoke of the Powells and the Wileys. Was there anything else to tell?"

"No," responded the bride in a dead voice, "there was nothing else to tell."

She was thinking that if Joe had said nothing more than that, neither could she approach the subject comprehensively or frankly. The keeping of his confidence hampered her with prohibition. The denunciation of her ancestors as breakers of faith, and of her blood as incapable of trust, became forbidden topics, to smolder in unspoken indignation and to feed her confusion of anger and misery.

"Then what could shipwreck us?" he repeated. "If your love's stronger than a whim—and I know it is—it can stand against a gale. A puff of breeze won't capsize it!"

"My love," she told him, but with her face averted, "can stand against any attack but treason. No one has the power to kill it—except you."

"And I wouldn't, of course!"

"I'm afraid you have."

"In God's name how?"

"By a lie of silence—by making outspoken honesty the basis of our whole relationship, and then holding back the only thing you thought we might disagree about."

"I didn't revive that old story," said the man gravely, "because I knew that you came back with your imagination kindled—almost inflamed. I thought that just now you were apt to attach exaggerated values to things which, in other moods, would hold their proper relations. We are Massachusetts people, you and I. I suppose, if you searched its branches closely enough, you'd find horse thieves and murderers swinging from every family tree in Christendom. Our lawbreakers happened to assassinate one another, but they were only collateral relatives—why not let them lie in peace?"

"Only collateral!" She turned flaming eyes on him, gustily swept by anger which was a reaction from unhappiness, and which was fed by the superiority of his indulgent tone. "That is to say, through our mothers—the mothers who molded and created us out of their own flesh and blood and agony. But let that go by." She broke off and began again, with a bewilderingly abrupt change of tack. "I am living in the twentieth century and talking a twentieth

century language. Whether it be in Boston or Kentucky, a marriage must stand on honesty. It seems you couldn't trust me with frankness—and that means shipwreck of our happiness."

"I did trust you implicitly," he avowed; "but I knew that at certain times we are swayed by exaggerated imaginations. This didn't seem to be the time to take up that subject."

"Exactly!" she caught him up, with an almost breathless quickness. "That's just why the thing you call a trifle is really a crisis. If you had treated it as a trifle, I might have done the same; but you didn't. To you it was so big that you didn't dare to speak of it, or to risk argument about it. To you it was big enough to become a *Bluebeard* closet locked up so that I couldn't open it. You let me chatter admiringly of my impressions about the mountains—and then, as if I were an irresponsible child, you changed the subject and kept your secret. You didn't trust me with facts—and now I can't trust you with my life!"

"This is all hysteria, Phyllis," he said, his face paling more markedly under its sunburn. "It will all evaporate like a fog burned off by the sun. The words that were really yours, that came from the heart, were those you spoke when you said, 'I will!'"

She shook her head.

"You made a mistake, Dick. The words of the ceremony are just emblems of something bigger. I couldn't tell you there—one doesn't make scenes like that; but I can't live with you. I can't go on with this. Dishonesty's a black frost. One touch kills love!"

The man sat looking into her face with an incredulity that seemed to paralyze his thought. Out of that stunned condition he appeared to beat his way back slowly and gropingly, altering and hardening as he came, until the boyishness died in his face and left it rigidly set.

"It's too late for such a decision," he said at last. His voice had taken on a metallic edge. "You're building a crisis of accusation and injustice out of an absurdity. Your mountain of grievance is a molehill of nerves. No one forced you to marry me. Love led the way in, and the only way out is divorce. For that you have no ground."

Dick Carson bent forward. For an in-

stant she saw such a flame in his eyes as she had seen glint transiently in those of his brother. Then she heard his voice pitched to implacability.

"I'm no caveman. I wouldn't try to hold you by any ties except those of love; but the love must have its chance. Try to remember that you're adult and educated. You've just taken a vow of your own free will. I mean to have you keep it. You're going with me to my house, as my wife, and you're going to stay there!"

"I've told you that I don't mean to live with you, because you've stricken honesty out of the contract."

"And I tell you that you shall! You're going willingly, if you will, and as a prisoner if you won't; but you're going. Before you pronounce the experiment a failure, you're going to make the experiment!"

Phyllis let him have the full battery of her blazing eyes and the full scorn of her impassioned voice.

"Do you think that if you declare war on me you can frighten me into tame submission? You talk of being modern, and accuse me of forgetting what century this is. Who's doing that now? Is it modern or medieval to carry a woman off against her will and hold her as a chattel?"

"We'll talk of that in our own house—yours and mine," he retorted. "If the woman comes willingly, she must stay. You are going to stay—and fulfill your contract. It's too late to parley about that!"

"I'll stop the car and get out now!" she declared furiously, leaning forward to tap on the pane.

Dick Carson caught her arms and drew her back.

"You go to my house," he said; "and when we get there, if you want to talk any more about this, we'll talk there—uninterrupted. You are my wife."

"I am also your enemy!"

Across the immensity of sapphire water on which the road looked down the sun, which had been brilliant, ceased to shine, and the sea turned heavy and leaden. In from the horizon, wet and bleak with gray chill, swept shoreward a rack of fog, and on their two pale faces the dismal grayness seemed mirrored.

VI

FRANKFORT, the capital of Kentucky, lies in the blue grass region, where the westward-thrusting tide of pioneer enterprise

paused long ago and breathed with the exultation of victory. Here, after scaling barrier upon barrier of wilderness walls, and suffering the loss of many stragglers, the "overland argonauts" felt that they had reached the promised land of milk and honey. Here blossomed a young culture that sprang from the transplanted root of an older aristocracy.

The State capital straddles the banks of the Kentucky River. Along that stream, from its highland sources, come diminishing hills, which are the little brothers of the mountains themselves; so that it is as if highland and lowland, two widely variant and almost opposite features of statehood, meet there and clasp hands.

The mountain man who has lived apart for two centuries in an unchanging isolation knows Frankfort as he knows no other "settlement." To it, down the river, he rides the "spring tide" with his great rafts of floated timber. He knows it, also, for two other reasons. Ambition has one outlet only in his aloof habitat, and that one leads him to a political career, with the Legislature as its goal. Likewise the gospel of individual law, to which he adheres whether he be ambitious or unambitious, sometimes throws him into conflict with the law of the land; and so it comes to pass that every community has absentees who have gone "down below" because they have been "penitentiared."

Lloyd Powell had been penitentiared, and it was not the first time. Now, on a summer morning when the hills were green along the river bank, and when the wheat fields were mellowing into a pregnant gold, he stood in the office of the prison's warden. He was listening to a brief and perfunctory dissertation upon the text of "Go and sin no more"—a ceremonial traditional on such occasions within the grim stone walls, atop which rifle-armed sentinels always paced.

The convict was no longer shamefully liveried in the stripes of his felony, but was even more awkward in the new and cheap suit of sleazy black which the State bestows as a farewell gift upon its liberated prisoners. He stood silently near the desk, looking absently at racked bunches of iron keys; and the warden was conscious of a certain embarrassment.

This valedictory preaching had become a matter of routine, through which, on most occasions, long habit carried him flu-

ently enough. He held in his hand the five-dollar bill which went with the black suit—the modest capital with which the State expected the prisoner to refinance his life. Yet the threadbare phrases of admonition did not slip freely from the official tongue. The authority of right exhorting wrong did not sit with jaunty confidence on the warden's manner.

Perhaps it was something in the elderly prisoner's face or bearing. At all events, the lecturer suppressed a grin of irony. A thought flashed into his mind which, if put frankly into words, would have run somewhat after this wise:

"It's a great joke for me to stand here talking like a missionary to this old chap. I'm a practical politician spouting a line of bunk, and he looks like some old prophet out of the Bible!"

Lloyd Powell was, in truth, a hard prisoner to lecture. His offenses had always been born of an overzealous allegiance to his own mistaken convictions of honor, and it is difficult to rebuke a man who stands whole in his self-respect. Now, with his head prison-shorn, and with his face lined and pallid—the effect of a lowland prison upon a man bred for the sparkle of mountain air—he looked more the hermit saint than the branded felon.

About him hung something like uncomplaining martyrdom. His broad shoulders had been stooped, and his sixty-one inches of spare, powerful height had bent during these imprisoned years. The fires in the hawk-keen eyes were dimmed, but the simple dignity of demeanor had survived, and it was this dignity that the warden felt, and under which he fidgeted.

"Powell," said the officer, remembering that the sooner he started the sooner he would finish, and regulating his tone to sternness, "you are going out to-day. I hope you'll stay out this time."

The highlander nodded gravely. The sound of his name had given him a little start, because for so long he had answered only to a number.

"You came here to do twenty years for homicide," went on the warden, refreshing his memory from certain official records that lay under his left hand. "Of that term there is still fifteen years to run. If you are walking out into the world to-day a free man, you have the mercy of the Governor to thank. He has pardoned you and restored you to citizenship."

Lloyd Powell again nodded gravely, but his words were firm in their tone of respectful amendment.

"I'm beholden ter the Governor," he said; "but hit warn't him thet moved heaven an' yarth ter sot me free. Hit was *her*!"

"It was Miss Belknap who interested herself in your case, and who carried it to the Governor, with recommendations that he found convincing," admitted the warden; "but Miss Belknap had no pardoning power."

"No, sir, thet's jedgmatically right, I reckon." The prisoner's eyes kindled. "Hit was *her*, though, thet heared tell of me when she went up thar in the hills whar I comes from, an' journeyed hyar ter the penitentiary ter see me." He paused, then added with a sudden burst of fervor: "She come right in hyar whar I was a sulterin' at, with the light a shinin' in her face like some angel straightway from God's kingdom. I'm beholden ter the Governor, but fer *her*—fer *her* I'd lay down an' die, ef needs be—or even come back hyar ergin!"

"You'll please Miss Belknap best by *not* coming back here again," observed the warden dryly. He lifted his hands, as one who throws aside a pretense. "At all events, Powell," he added, "I'm done lecturing you. I'm supposed to give good advice to a man when I send him out, but I'm not going through any such empty formula with you. I know your blood acts in a certain way, and I know it takes better sermonizing than mine to make a feud fighter into anything else. Besides, I've watched you here, and I strongly suspect that you're a more godly man than I am myself. There's your five-dollar bill, and good luck to you!"

"I'm obleeged ter ye," repeated the prisoner, taking his money. "I seeks ter be a godly man an' a true Christian. What time we spends hyar on this yarth hain't nothin' save only a breathin' spell afore we faces the Almighty; but"—once more the hawk light flared aburst in the piercing gray eyes—"but when I meets a Wiley in the highway, I aims ter hold my half of the road; an' ef he hectors me too tormentin' fur, I aims ter fight!"

Outside the gates and through the streets of the little town the elderly man made his deliberate way, with his eyes feeding hungrily on the low hills that carried the savor of steeper mountains. His pallor and his garb trade-marked him to the knowing eyes

of the State capital, and more than once he overheard a low-voiced exclamation:

"There goes an ex-convict. Even money he'll come back!"

But Lloyd Powell carried his lean chin high, and walked on with the preoccupied dignity of a sheik from the desert; for, thanks to the efforts of Phyllis Belknap, Lloyd Powell was going home.

The man who was sampling freedom again after so long and so stale a diet of duress took an accommodation train, and left it again some hours later. It set him down at a county seat, where the broad white ribbons of metaled turnpike began to tangle their meshes with ragged threads of red clay roads, and where upon the billowing smoothness of blue grass pastures commenced to feel the encroachment of strangling undergrowth.

From this point his road mounted along an ever steepening stairway, and he had to journey afoot. His eye quickened at the sight of elder bushes foaming into bloom and trumpet vines blossoming with red cornucopias. He took joy rather than regret in the down-running of the human scale inversely with the lifting of the altitude, until sound brick houses gave way to chinked cabins, and the flash of motor cars was exchanged for the straining of half mired axles along creek-bed ways. Hardwood forests closed in dense and wild about him, and along the blue-green shoulders of the range wet shreds of cloud hung trailing like arrested bursts of shrapnel.

When night fell, Lloyd Powell knelt down beside a spring that gushed from a living fount of rock. Folding his gnarled hands across his broad but hollowed breast, he raised his face and prayed.

"Almighty God," he said aloud, "I've done been despitely used an' hampered in prison; but Thy beloved Son, He didn't only suffer thet wise an' fashion, but likewise the men thet stood for the law crucified Him ter death. When I sulterd thar, Thou didn't no fashion disremember me. Thou sent an angel ter minister unte me, an' Thou softened the heart of the Governor ter sot me free. Now I'm goin' back ter the hills whar the water's fitten ter drink an' the air's fitten ter breathe. Almighty God, I gives Thee survig'rous thanks!"

That same night, some twelve hundred miles away, Cullom Bowes, who had in the

morning acted as usher at a wedding, sat in a shack from which the outlook was almost as isolated, though the spirit of the prospect was antithetical. Where Lloyd Powell had in his ears the whisper of breezes running in the leafage of high forests, Cullom Bowes listened to the steady booming of surf on a sandy shore. Where, at nightfall, Lloyd Powell had to raise his eyes to see the stars between the peak tops, Cullom Bowes watched the afterglow fade to starry night across flats of salt meadow, beach sand, and wastes of Atlantic waters reaching to a shallow horizon.

When Bowes left the wedding party, he turned his car toward Boston, and opened it wide; but before many miles had slipped under his tires he ground on his brakes, backed, and turned about. The thought of the city had become intolerable, and the longing for solitude was a hunger in his heart.

Among sand dunes and salt meadows, backed by the pine woods of Cape Cod, he had a small place to which it was his habit to go every winter for duck shooting. This retreat, several hours distant by motor, now stood locked and empty, but its keys hung on his ring, and there was provender in its lockers. The blue-striped telegraph poles that mark the shore road ran backward along the cape as he drove his machine, and nightfall found him sitting before the stanch cabin, about which was stored a full complement of ducking boats, wooden decoys, and all the gear of the sportsman.

Far away across the waters, beyond the light that blinked white at half-minute intervals, he saw, until the night curtain rolled down, a yellow, green-rimmed promontory, and his bruised spirit drew from it a mingling of spiritual agony and melancholy pleasure.

On that point—some ten miles away as a duck might wing its course, but many miles more by the road that twisted around low marshland and broken littoral—stood the house to which his friend had that day brought his bride. She was there now, he supposed, and in that thought, had he been able to disengage it from the other thoughts that slugged his heart to sickness, he might have found comfort. She was no longer Phyllis Belknap, the woman about whom his hopes had orbited. Just now, he reflected, she and the man who had been his closest friend were opening, like a new and marvelous gift, their casket of happiness

together. It was, of course, a happiness which they hoped would last through life, but it could never again hold the fresh wonder of this beginning.

In their thoughts to-night there would naturally be no room for memories of him. That was inevitable, but it hurt—hurt most poignantly.

Cullom Bowes groaned, then rose to go heavily into his shack and light a fire in his stove.

VII

AFTER the little climax in the car, when Dick Carson had despaired of persuasion and had laid down his ultimatum to his bride, there had been some miles of wretched silence. They had run through the fog that enveloped Chatham and come into sunlight beyond, but the gloom within them remained.

The man knew this girl who had fought for him and chosen him. He knew that the nature which had first captivated him and then enlisted the whole of his love was not a petty nature. He assured himself that her anarchy of mood must pass like some paroxysm of sudden delirium, not outlasting the fever from which it sprang.

Steadfastness of character must prevail over any storm of fury, and in her steadfastness he firmly believed, though just now she seemed wholly and implacably dedicated to warfare. He knew that the specious quiet which had descended suddenly upon her after her fiery declaration that she was his enemy, as well as his wife, bore no relation to submission. Unless he won her back, she would remain as remote from him as if she had refused to marry him—more remote, perhaps. That the sun would shine in her eyes again he kept assuring himself with endless reiteration; but it must shine from within. He could not kindle it from without.

So this was their journey to the house which he had made ready for her, and which they had planned together with the eager impatience of children on the night before Christmas!

A less thoughtful man might have questioned, in his chagrin, the worth of a love which could so abruptly veer to animosity; but Dick Carson knew better than that. He had gaged this woman, and he stood by his judgment, even in the face of this extraordinary catastrophe.

A wiser man than he might have been

willing to rehabilitate himself by suing for peace on her own terms, and trusting to her generosity; but Dick was constitutionally unable to do that. The blood which he declared was only remotely his not only flowed robustly in his veins, but fed and colored the thinking of his brain; and in that blood there was no possibility of yielding a position which he felt to be righteous.

Phyllis, too, was answering unsuspectingly to that blood. For both of them it was written that an issue once raised could not be laid down without battle.

Dick Carson had lived on the dreams of this home-coming. He had taken delight in planning a dozen small surprises which the house held in store for his bride. With an intensity that almost became awe, he had lived on from week to week, from day to day, toward the moment when he should open the door and they should enter their home for a life together.

Once, as they drew near to the place of their destination, the man turned his face partly away, and the mingled fragrance of salt air, pine needles, and honeysuckle, which they had always called the incense of their love-making, smote his nostrils and his heart.

Phyllis caught it, too. Seeing the fixed misery of his face, her own eyes momentarily misted. After all, his eagerness had been no greater than her own—and she had held back no secrets because she could not trust him with them. That thought congealed the suddenly swelling tide of tenderness that leaped in her, and the hand that was stealing forward to rest on his arm withdrew itself.

Beside a man accused of almost any crime on the calendar, against any one but herself, she would have stood immovably staunch to the end. The single crime that she could not condone was the one with which she now taxed him—a mental infidelity at the very outset of their journey.

The west was gathering the light of closing day toward the sea line when the car turned into a sandy road that meandered through a forest of white pines, and, after traversing its alleyway of sun-mottled shade, came out on a high meadow that merged into a flowered lawn. Beyond that lawn, dominated by the house, stretched a green-framed bay, itself unbelievably blue.

Instinctively the man turned, and on his lips hovered a smile of forgetfulness and welcome. So often had the sight of that

soul-satisfying vista meant happiness to him that now it swallowed up all other emotions. So often had it meant the same to her that she almost forgot all else—almost, but not quite.

Their glances met, softened, and then, like crossed blades, parried and hardened. The impalpable and impervious wall between them had for an instant been well-nigh breached, but it rose again in blankness and separation. The whimsical speech of welcome that had risen to the man's lips died on them, and he opened the door of the car with a formal courtesy.

Silently he led Phyllis through the front door, which was to have been the portal of gay and ceremonial entry—their triumphal arch. Up the stairway to the bedroom, where chintz-curtained windows looked off across the bay, he conducted her in embarrassed silence. At the door stood the maid who had come with her from her old home, and who seemed to him just now a jealous duenna.

Martha, the maid, withdrew into the room, and for a moment the bride paused on the threshold; but she stood so as to bar the doorway uninvitingly, and Carson made no effort to follow her in. There were some small surprises there, too, and he had gleefully looked forward to seeing her discover and delight in them; but the program was altered now.

"I have waited for this," he said half beseechingly, in a low voice. "Do you remember how we used to quote—

"Green days in the mountains and blue days by the sea?"

She caught her lower lip between her teeth, and her lids closed with a quiver of pain.

"How could I forget it?" she asked.

"Forget everything else," he pleaded.

"I can't," she told him quietly. "I wish I could!"

Carson went to the adjoining room—his own—and dully changed into flannels. Then he went downstairs and awaited her on the terrace that looked seaward.

Time dragged heavily there, with all the sparkle of anticipation gone stale. The cigarette that he lighted died in his fingers. His eye, wandering idly this way and that, saw Martha—who, he fancied, should be helping Phyllis to change from her traveling clothes—slipping hurriedly across the lawn toward the garage.

Rising, Dick went slowly through the pines in the same direction. The maid had left the garage when he arrived, but he saw McDonough, his chauffeur, standing by the car with a face of unaccustomed glumness.

"What's on your mind, Mac?" he made casual inquiry.

The man looked up with a start, and grinned away his rueful expression.

"Well, I was planning to take out the spark plugs this evening, Mr. Carson; but we can't tinker the old boat and drive her at the same time, can we?"

"Hardly, but I guess we are in for the night, Mac."

The man looked at him in bewilderment and wiped oily hands on a bunch of waste hardly less oily.

"That girl Martha's just after tellin' me that Miss Belknap—beg pardon, I mean Mrs. Carson—wanted the car in a half hour, with plenty of gas in the tank."

For a moment Carson averted his face while he made a needful effort to school his features, masking his byplay under the pretense of lighting a fresh cigarette. Then he spoke quietly.

"Martha must have misunderstood," he said. "We shan't want the car until tomorrow. Go ahead with your work, Mac."

VIII

BACK in the house, the husband paced the terrace with his eyes on the stairhead and his brow drawn, until Phyllis came down. He saw at once that her face was set to a fixity of resolution, as if she fronted a difficult interview and meant to see it unyieldingly through. He saw, too, that she had not changed her traveling dress.

"I've decided, Dick," she told him, "to drive over to Eleanor Bristow's, at Yarmouth, and think things out there alone."

For a moment the man distrusted himself to speak. Then he said quietly:

"Suppose we go out there to the edge of the lawn, where we can talk without being overheard by the servants?"

"Talking won't help just now," she answered; "and it may hurt."

Carson shook his head.

"Still I ask it," he returned. "It's the least you can do."

For an interval Phyllis hesitated; then she nodded a listless assent and said:

"All right! Lead the way—but I've ordered the car to be ready in half an hour."

They passed from the terrace across the

lawn, where borders of old-fashioned flowers nodded, and found themselves standing under the branches of clustered pines, which screened them from any eyes about the house. Spread before them were the blue waters of the bay and the gorgeousness of sunset.

"Now," said Carson, "please be a little more specific. Good faith can't be arbitrarily canceled. A few hours ago you made a vow to live with me and love me till death parted us—and you tell me you are going away to meditate upon repudiating that vow!"

The implacable expression that had given to her delicate features the quality of granite as she sat in the car was gone now; but something like hopelessness and despair had taken its place. Abruptly she wheeled.

"Dick," she exclaimed, tense with earnestness, "can't you understand that good faith is what I've got to feel sure of?"

She stood close to him, with the light of the sunset glow making a nimbus about her hair. Her slender figure had sea and sky for background.

"You talk," she went on rapidly, "as if I were wantonly and irresponsibly throwing down the whole structure of your life in ruins, and as if I could do that without crucifying myself. I've lived, and lived utterly, for the day when I could be all to you a woman can be to a man—could give you all that a woman can give. Do you think it's a little thing for me to see all that go to ruin?"

"Why need it, dear?" he demanded. "Why not keep the faith and repudiate the nightmare? Faith is real, and nightmares aren't."

"Because, Dick, you began by breaking it." She spread her hands in a gesture of finality. "Suppose that when I came back from the mountains I was all unbalanced as to the right proportions of things, as you say—"

"It was because I felt that you were," he interrupted, "and knew that you would soon see values right again, that I put off speaking of a thing which could only be important to you if you had lost your mental balance."

"Exactly," she answered with the air of condemning him out of his own mouth. "You saw a possible issue in it, and you didn't trust me. Now I can't trust you, and if we don't trust each other how can we go on together?"

"I have done nothing," he said with careful deliberation, "that wasn't dictated by love, and love alone. It is too late now to bring such a charge against me. You made your contract. You made it willingly, I believe."

"I made it on terms of mutual candor," she answered. "If you bought cloth for wool and found it wasn't wool, would you accept it?"

"Then you're done with me before you start?"

"No, Dick. I simply can't tell yet where we will come out of it; but it's got to be thought out before we can go any further. There's need of readjustment, it seems, and—and I can't think it out here, that's all."

"Why not here?"

"Because the habit of loving you is too strong. There would be moments when it might overwhelm everything else."

With an inarticulate sound in his throat and a rush of triumphant light to his eyes, Carson stepped forward. His arms came out to crush her close, but she slipped away and put up both her hands against him.

"You do love me!" he exclaimed. "You have just admitted it. In spite of your feelings against me, which is nothing but nerves, you love me, and that's the only question in life for us!"

"No, it isn't the only question," she corrected him inexorably. "I'm going to Eleanor's to think it out. You can come there for your answer in—say three days."

"I already have my answer," he declared. "It is that you love me and that I love you. You are here, and here is where you belong!"

"Not yet," she obdurately declared; "not until we've cleared away all mists of dishonesty and thought things out in their new bearings. If I come back to you at all, I'll come willingly and eagerly. That's the only way I could ever come. It's the only way you ought to want me to come."

He stood for a moment looking seaward. Slowly his fine face, which had looked boyish under the emotion of hearing her confession of love, hardened again. It set itself until it was the face of the fighting Wiley; and when he spoke, his voice befitted that expression.

"No!" he said. "It's too late for that. I'm willing to pledge myself to any course you may demand, but whatever things need settling between us must be settled under

our own roof. I know there is no spirit of deceit in me, and when I made my vows I meant them."

"I've ordered the car," she told him in a weary voice. "I'm going to Eleanor's. I've tried to make you understand."

"I countermanded your order for the car." He sought, without entire success, to make his tone matter-of-fact. "I told Mac it was a mistake."

Jets of white-hot indignation leaped into Phyllis's eyes.

"So you've overridden the first order I've given to a servant in this house?"

"I've overridden that one."

"Dick," she said slowly, "you're choosing the wrong way to bring me back into accord with you. You're taking a dangerous chance of making me hate you!"

"I'm taking a man's way of protecting his home," he asserted. "You leave me no alternative."

"I warn you, Dick!" Phyllis's voice was low and ominously quiet. Her eyes held a still but intense light of danger. "You must win me—you certainly can't conquer me by force. I'm no Sabine woman. It's got to be love or war between us!"

For a moment he wavered. Tides of admiration and love fought overwhelmingly on the side of peace, but a stubborn conviction that any surrender now might be a surrender of everything fought doggedly back. He drew his shoulders straight and narrowed his lids.

"Whichever it is to be," he said, "we'll settle the question here!"

(To be continued in the October number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

OUR FRIEND THE PAST

THE thought I bring is nothing new—

Old as most "new" thoughts are;

Old as the last new-furbished dance

Or rediscovered star—

Though changes crowd about our heads

So furious and fast,

Would you understand the present,

You must dip into the past.

No need to fear though anarchy plebs

Sweep wildly on their way;

All that is good and fair in life

Came long ago to stay.

The Immortals sometimes change their names,

But the Immortals last;

If this you deem an old wives' tale,

Dip a little in the past.

There as you look your eyes may see,

As in a magic glass,

How this same present came to be,

And what shall come to pass;

For what has been shall be again,

Said King Ecclesiast;

Would you understand the present,

You must dip into the past.

For fashions come and fashions go,

And come and go again,

And life is still the same strange song,

With death for its refrain.

Scorn not the wisdom that old Time

With blood and tears amassed;

The present has no better friend,

Believe me, than the past!

Richard Le Gallienne

Hanging's Too Good for Him

THE PATHETIC STORY OF TOMMY ELLINGER, OF NEW YORK,
AND AN INNOCENT YOUNG GIRL FROM THE COUNTRY

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

HE first emerged from obscurity at his father's funeral. He was the only son and the heir to everything, and therefore, of course, the center of interest; but immediately and forever he destroyed all the tepid sympathy and good will of the assembled relatives by his curious air of immense carelessness, his foppish nonchalance.

He hadn't even the decency to wear a dark suit, they observed. He was dressed in light gray, evidently quite new, and he kept his hands in his pockets. It never occurred to any of them that his indifference might be a clumsy effort to conceal an immeasurable embarrassment. Neither did any one else remember what he remembered—that his father had detested any sort of formal mourning. And it was Tommy's destiny always to do a thing in the wrong way, always to antagonize, invariably to blunder.

It was not regret for the loss of his father, or any great regard for his opinions, that caused Tommy to remember and to respect his wishes. It was nothing more than a naïve and kindly sentimentality. His father had been a horrible bully to him, the great bogey of his childhood. His mother had died when he was very little, and he had been sent off to boarding school at once.

It seemed to the family that Tommy had *always* been at school, winter and summer. Once in a great while he had emerged at some cousin's Christmas party, a rather silly blond boy in military uniform, always spoken of as "poor little Tommy Ellinger." There were no family rumors or traditions about him, no reports of his behavior at school.

Now, however, that he had definitely come to life, it was necessary for the family

to decide upon him, and they decided unfavorably. He got, then and there, the name of being "defiant" and "conceited."

His father's elder brother was to be his guardian until he was twenty-one—a task which disgusted and appalled Uncle James. He was an old bachelor lawyer, living in a hotel. Naturally his first thought for Tommy was college, which would remove the boy for all his minority, and even longer; but Tommy fought desperately against that. His hatred for books, for herding with other young males, for all the bullying and chaffing which terrified his awkward innocence, for the competition which dazed his lumbering mind, made him unusually resolute. Business, too, he summarily repudiated.

"Then what do you intend to do?" his uncle demanded, with false patience.

"Well," said Tommy desperately, "why couldn't I be a lawyer, like you?"

His uncle looked at him with a grim smile, and answered nothing. The subject was dropped for the time being, and Tommy went to live at his uncle's hotel, to make up his mind about his very important future. He lived a wretched sort of life, forever hanging about the lobby, or sitting through vaudeville shows and musical comedies. He ate breakfast with his exasperated old uncle every morning, and dinner almost every evening.

There was something peculiarly and intolerably irritating about Tommy—some quality which, in spite of his invariable good temper and his ingratiating manners, infuriated his uncle. A perfect young ass, the old lawyer called him.

Why was it that the qualities which would have been so endearing in a girl of eighteen were so maddening in Tommy? Why was he, with his youth, his boundless good will,

his plaintive innocence, really nothing on earth but a young ass?

He was a great lanky boy with a naïve, good-humored face and a preposterous foppish air, a man-of-the-world air; wearing clothes ostentatiously correct and an amazing eyeglass with a broad black ribbon. He imagined that he looked like a foreign diplomat, while at the bottom of his heart he was quite conscious of being and looking a puppy. He swaggered, but without any self-assurance.

He devoted great thought to his clothes, and he could not refrain from mentioning his sartorial inventions and improvements to his uncle.

"What do you think of the cut of this coat?" he would ask. "Do you notice this shoulder? Rather good, eh?"

"Beautiful!" his uncle would say. "I never saw such grace and elegance—a regular Beau Brummel! You're fascinating. There's nothing that interests me like the cut of your coats!"

Then Tommy would open the evening paper and laugh loudly and ostentatiously at something in it, to show how undisturbed he was.

"Why don't you go out?" the old gentleman used to ask, often and often, when, their dinner finished, they went up together in the lift to the little sitting room they shared. "What's the matter with you, Thomas? A boy of your age, sitting at home here with an old fellow like me, night after night! Why don't you go out somewhere and enjoy yourself? Haven't you any friends?"

Well, he hadn't. All the boys he had known and liked in the military academy up the Hudson had come from the farthest ends of the country—from Texas, from California, from Maine. He had never been particularly popular, anyhow, and he was too shy and too ridiculous to make friends now.

His uncle attached great importance to this, for he himself had scores of friends. He wished Tommy to be a sort of creature the like of which is no longer to be found—the traditional, old-fashioned beau, the arbiter of elegance, welcomed everywhere, affable, agreeable, but forever unattached, the society man of a past generation. He supplied the boy with spending money, and introduced him to a few charming young married women and a great many old bachelors.

"Now go ahead!" he told him. "Make yourself popular! Make yourself liked! A young man of your age, of good family, with a little money in your pockets, with good prospects!"

He was invited to one or two sedate houses, for his uncle's sake, but nothing came of it. The society life toward which his uncle urged him forever eluded him. In fact, he had no life of any sort. He was only waiting, hanging about in innocent and dreary idleness, unable to believe that life should so cheat him of every joy, every excitement.

It was spring when Tommy's father died and he left the military academy. He spent a horrible summer with his uncle, in a hotel in town, or at other similar hotels in the mountains, on the coast, anywhere and everywhere. Then came a still worse winter, during which the old gentleman's exasperation rose to a fury.

They would go now and then to a musical comedy of the liveliest sort, this being the Uncle James's idea of what the boy ought to like. When the old man saw him sitting there not liking it, when he saw him not caring for or comprehending wines, a barbarian as to food, absolutely indifferent to the arts, and hopeless in regard to sport, he became almost homicidal.

"Go away!" he shouted at him. "Go and spend this summer by yourself! I won't waste the money on taking you to a decent place. Go on a farm! Go to some cheap, miserable, damnable little country boarding house, where you can sit and gape all day, like the booby you are!"

Tommy felt that it would be paradise now to get away from his uncle, no matter where. The idea of going off alone, unbullied, unthwarted, quite dazzled him. He was only too ready to go anywhere his uncle suggested.

So Uncle James answered several newspaper advertisements, and at last found a place which he felt would be suitable. He wrote and made all arrangements, and then gave Tommy his directions, money that was to last him for a month, and the following advice:

"Don't make a fool of yourself about any of the girls there. Remember, you haven't a penny for the next three years except what I choose to allow you; and if you get yourself mixed up, or compromised, I won't help you. I won't recognize any responsibility of that sort!"

Tommy turned scarlet.

"Not in my line, Uncle James!" he replied, with extreme jauntiness. And off he went.

II

His uncle almost forgot about Tommy for some time. He had a letter from the boy every week—a stupid, schoolboy letter which he hardly bothered to read. "The weather had been very hot. I guess you are glad not to be here, aren't you? There is a lot of hay fever around now. It is certainly a lucky thing that you didn't come"—and that sort of thing.

Then, while Uncle James was enjoying his little breakfast at the corner table in the grill room, which he had occupied for years and years, just as he was about to taste that invariable bowl of oatmeal with cream and powdered sugar, his eye was caught by a headline on the front page of his paper. He dropped his spoon on the floor.

**FATHER SHOOT'S GIRL'S BETRAYER—
TRAGEDY NARROWLY AVERTED AT
THE HOTEL TRESSILLON—SON OF
THE LATE THOMAS ELLINGER
WOUNDED**

He stared and stared at the thing. The paper crackled in his trembling hands, the letters swam before his eyes. Nonsense! "Son of the late Thomas Ellinger"—must be a mistake!

He read the story with a furious sort of incredulity. It was a nasty story of a young city man going out to a little country town for a vacation, boarding in the house of a decent farmer, and running off one night with the poor little sixteen-year-old daughter. He had taken her to a disreputable hotel and registered as man and wife, which they weren't. And the decent farmer, the outraged, the desperate father, had tracked them, and, standing in the doorway of the crowded and noisy restaurant, had fired two shots at the girl's betrayer—at Tommy! At the boy who a few months ago had been sitting opposite Uncle James at this very table!

"No! Nonsense!" he cried, crumpling up the paper and throwing it under the table. "One of those beastly newspaper stories! Damned lies, all of them!"

He went up to his room, got his hat and stick, and hurried out, furtive, terrified, afraid that every one was pointing him out as the uncle of that fellow. He wanted to

telephone, where he would not be seen or heard, somewhere outside of his hotel. He went into a booth in a cigar store, and called for the Hotel Tressillon.

"Mr. Ellinger," he demanded.

In a moment he heard that familiar young voice, with its exaggerated accent.

"This is Mr. Ellinger speaking."

"Thomas!" cried the old gentleman.

The boy gave a sort of gasp. Then, with his unfailing genius for doing the wrong thing, he assumed an airy and off-hand tone.

"Hello, Uncle James!" he said jauntily.

"I didn't know that you were back in town again."

"See here!" shouted the old gentleman, in a tremendous voice. "Is it true—this abominable thing I saw in the papers? Is it *you*?"

"Yes," replied Tommy.

"Yes?" repeated his uncle's voice, incredulous. "Yes? *You* did a thing like that? Good God! Explain yourself, Thomas!"

"I can't!" said Tommy.

There was a brief silence.

"You—you young cur!" The old man's voice was trembling. "Don't ever come near me again. Don't let me see you. I'd like to shoot you! You miserable, dastardly cur! You've disgraced the whole family. You've disgraced your father's name. I'd like to see you hanged—only hanging's too good for you!"

III

TOMMY's face was scarlet, as if he had been struck. He went across the room, as far as he could get from the telephone, sat down, tried to smoke a cigarette, and tried to smile carelessly. He had to give it up. He hid his hot face in his arms, and sat there, amazed, confounded, utterly overwhelmed, at his own deed and at the awful consequences of it.

His uncle's voice he recognized as the voice of the world in general. That was how he was to be regarded in the future—a cad, a cur, hanging too good for him. A pariah—he who so valued the good opinion of others! It was the sort of thing one couldn't live down, ever. His life was blasted at its very beginning.

He knew that he could never justify himself. There were the facts in the newspapers, and he couldn't deny any of them. How explain, even try to explain, what lay

behind them? He himself didn't comprehend it. He was more surprised, more shocked, than any one else could possibly have been.

He looked at his wrist watch, which lay on the table because it couldn't be put on over his bandaged wrist, and saw with dismay that it was only ten o'clock in the morning. The thought of the hours he would have to pass, shut up there alone, overwhelmed him. He was ashamed to go out, even into the corridor. He had already had to face a doctor and the waiter who had brought up his breakfast, and his raw sensibilities had made each of these encounters an ordeal.

He imagined a quite preposterous hostility. He was already an outcast, he was deserted, no one would come or telephone; he had nothing whatever to do now, or in the future. He looked around the ugly little hotel bedroom, and he felt that he was in prison, judged and convicted by his fellow men, and already banished from them.

Nothing to do, but plenty to think of, to recollect, and to examine. He leaned back in his chair, staring at the ceiling, and tried his honest best to retrace all the steps of the affair and to discover the true measure of his guilt.

He remembered every minute detail. He saw himself getting on the train at the Grand Central, saw himself in the train reading magazines, hoping that the other passengers admired his clothes and his luggage, and fearing that they didn't. He remembered the dust and the heat and the tedium.

It was late afternoon when he reached Millersburg, and he was gratified to see from the window that a fair proportion of the population was assembled to see the New York train arrive. He was confident that he was causing more or less of a sensation as he descended, with his irreproachable tweed suit, his imposing eyeglass, and the latest thing in traveling bags.

He walked leisurely over to a solitary old carriage, climbed in, and directed the driver to take him to Mr. Van Brink's. Then he leaned back carelessly, prepared to review the landscape, when the jolting old vehicle stopped. They were not yet out of sight of the station, from whence the natives were still watching his progress.

"Well, what's wrong?" he asked the old driver. "Horse given out already?"

"Here ye be!" the driver answered dryly. "Here's Van Brink's!"

Tommy knew very well that he was being laughed at by the loungers at the station, as well as by the old driver, and he liked it no better than any one else would have liked it; but he was a genuinely good-natured sort of devil, and he grinned, in spite of a very real chagrin at so unimposing an arrival.

Having paid the driver lavishly, he walked along the little garden path before him, and up some steps to a little veranda. The door opened at once, and a hand reached for his bag.

"Come right in!" entreated a gentle young voice. "This way, please!"

The little house was cool and very dark, every shade pulled down, every shutter closed. Tommy followed the white dress that was ascending the stairs, and was presently led into a dim, breezy room, smelling of verbenas.

The white dress flitted over to the window and threw open the shutters.

"There!" she said, looking back over her shoulder and smiling.

That smile! Tommy looked at her, enchanted.

You could see that she was very young, although her figure was almost matronly—short, full, agreeably rounded. She had calm, clear gray eyes, fair hair neatly arranged, a rather pale, chubby face with blunt features, pretty enough; but what was she but a nice, ordinary little country girl in a calico dress? What was there, or could there be, in such a young person to arouse the faintest interest in a man of the world like Tommy?

Ah, it was something to which far more sophisticated souls than his must have succumbed—a lure so flamboyant, a charm so candidly voluptuous!

She was serenely aware of her carnal fascinations. She was ignorant, but not without a certain experience, and she had a fatal sort of instinct. She knew her power, and knew how to employ it.

She looked at Tommy with complete self-possession. She was not in any way awed by his clothes, his eyeglass, or his magnificent air. Indeed, it was he who grew red and confused before the calm gaze of the girl in the calico dress.

"Is there anything you'd like to have, Mr. Ellinger?" she asked politely. "There's towels—"

"No, not at all!" protested Tommy, in his best manner. "Thanks awfully, but there's nothing."

The little thing in the white dress went out.

Tommy unpacked his bag, and then, restless and hungry, wandered about the room, looked out of the window, yawned, whistled, brushed his hair again, wondered what was expected of him. At last a knock at the door, and the gentle young voice said:

"Supper's ready, Mr. Ellinger!"

She was waiting to show him the way to the dining room. She behaved, in fact, like a very nice little hostess, properly concerned with his comfort. He liked that, of course, and he liked the supper, too. It was a novel sort of meal to Tommy—cold meat, fried potatoes, little glass dishes of preserves and pickles, cakes, pies, strawberries, and coffee, all on the table together.

Old Van Brink and his wife made no impression on him at all. They were what he had expected—what they ought to be. He talked to them in his best manner, genial, very much at ease. He was ingenuously sure that they were kind and honest people, and that they admired him. All his interest centered on the calm little thing across the table.

Supper over, Van Brink retired to a rocking-chair with the newspaper, and his wife began to carry the dishes into the kitchen. The little thing looked at Tommy.

"Would you like to take a little walk?" she asked. "'Most every one does—down to the village."

"Charmed!" he assured her, with his inane magnificence. "Will you wait till I get my stick?"

So they set off together down the dark, tree-bordered street. It was cool and very quiet, with a wistful little breeze stirring in the leaves.

"Peaceful, isn't it?" said Tommy contentedly.

"Oh, yes! I hope it will do you good," the little thing answered benevolently.

Thanks, said Tommy, there wasn't much wrong with him—he needed a rest, that was all.

"Well, you'll get it, here!" said she, with a deep sigh.

"Why? Not much excitement?"

"Oh, you can't imagine! Year after year!"

He was sorry for her.

"But you'll be getting married one of these days," he assured her gallantly.

"There's no one here to marry," she said.

They had come into the brightly lighted Main Street, and Tommy became somewhat distraught. He was wondering what sort of impression he was producing on the natives. They were observing him. He saw girls turn to stare after him, and a group of youths on a corner snickered as he passed.

All this pleased him. He swung his stick and strolled on with exquisite indifference. The little thing, he fancied, must be admiring him tremendously.

But she wasn't. He was undoubtedly causing a sensation, this lofty stranger from the city with his remarkable clothes; but his smooth face was too innocent, his manner, for all its swagger, too ridiculously boyish. He was more or less stupid to this maiden accustomed to the loutish gallantries of the corner loafer, to facile caresses and furtive advances. He was insipid—"slow," she called him to herself; but of course he could be taught.

Coming to Egbert's Drug Store, they went in, at Tommy's suggestion, and each of them had a glass of soda. She did feel a certain triumph then, at his manners and his handful of change.

It was dark when they returned to the house.

"Would you like to sit on the porch?" she asked. "All right! Let's bring the hammock around."

So they brought the hammock from the little back garden and slung it on the veranda. They were hidden from the street by a tangle of honeysuckle. The window behind them was unlighted, and there wasn't a sound from the house. They might have been alone in the universe. No one disturbed them, no one came into sight. There they sat, in the sweet-scented dark, Tommy on the railing, the little white figure swaying in the hammock.

"Don't you want to smoke?" she asked.

"Thanks!" he answered. "Yes, I will, if you don't mind."

"If it's cigarettes, I'd like to have one, please."

He was surprised and rather offended, because this wasn't according to his idea of her.

"Sure it won't make you sick?" he asked.

"Oh, no!" she answered pleasantly. "We used to smoke at boarding school, you know."

He proffered a lighted match, and in its glare he caught a glimpse of her face, quietly smiling. Again he was fascinated, suddenly, unexpectedly.

They smoked for some time in silence. Tommy could see her curled up in the hammock, swinging just a little. All of a sudden she sighed.

"Oh, dear!"

"What is it?"

"Nothing much. For goodness' sake, Mr. Ellinger, how old are you?"

He tried to laugh in an amused way, but he was chagrined and puzzled by her tone.

"Why do you want to know?" he inquired.

"Never mind, if you'd rather not say."

"I've no objection to telling you, my—my dear young lady," he answered, nettled. "I'm—eighteen."

"Are you? I'm only sixteen. We're only kids, aren't we?"

He didn't like that. Moreover, he perceived something sinister beneath the words.

"I suppose so," he assented, in a tone of paternal indulgence.

"Call me 'Esther,'" said she. "Don't let's be silly! What's *your* name?"

He hesitated, and finally decided upon "Tom"; but she, like every one else, saw the inevitability of "Tommy."

There was a long silence. Then out of the dark came her calm little voice.

"Tommy," she said, "you're a funny boy!"

"Am I?" he said, with an uneasy laugh.

The situation was quite out of hand now. He didn't know what was expected of him as a man of the world. He did know, though, that he was failing.

"Tommy," said she, again, "come and sit here, beside me."

With a quite artificial alacrity he jumped up, went over to her, and sat down in the hammock, close to her. He called himself a fool, an imbecile, a contemptible ass.

"I ought to kiss her," he said to himself, "or put my arm around her, or at least hold her hand!"

But he couldn't. He couldn't even talk to her. He wanted, above everything else in the world, to run away. He was not flattered or in any way stirred or excited—only miserably ill at ease and instinctively

alarmed. He dared not move, even to turn his head.

At last Esther got up with a sigh.

"Good night, Tommy," she said. "I hope you'll sleep well!"

"Thanks," he answered, feeling utterly foolish and miserable.

IV

He did not sleep well. He lay in bed, his hands clasped under his head, looking out at the summer sky.

"She's a queer girl," he thought, with a sort of resentment. "She's bold—runs after a fellow; and yet you can see she doesn't care two straws for him."

In long imaginary conversations with Esther he regained his lost advantage. He was affable but cool—very cool. He could see her round little face quite clearly before him, her serene eyes, her neat fair hair.

He awoke after his restless night to a hot, still morning. He could not find a bath tub. Dressing reluctantly, unfreshed and a bit irritable, he went downstairs. It was a few minutes after eight by his watch—a very decent, early hour, he thought; but, looking into the dining room, he saw only one place laid on the long table.

Mrs. Van Brink hurried in from the kitchen, limp, hot, and painfully anxious.

"Set down to the table, Mr. Ellinger," she cried in her shrill voice. "I'll bring your breakfast right off. We're all done. You won't have to wait more'n a minute."

He ate alone, a little resentful that Esther didn't appear. Then he went out on the porch. No one there—the shady street was quiet and empty. He went around the house to the sun-baked little yard at the back, where he discovered Mrs. Van Brink hanging dish towels on a line in terrible haste. Her face became positively convulsed with worry at the sight of his listlessness.

"Now, then!" she cried. "You don't know what to do with yourself, I'll be bound! And I haven't got a minute to spare, with the dinner I have to get up for Mr. Van Brink at noon. His farm's four miles off, you know."

She stared at him, frowning, until an inspiration came.

"Maybe you'd enjoy to play on the harmonium," she suggested. "Esther's got some real sweet music."

Tommy did not know what a harmonium was; but she showed him a queer little organ in the parlor, and he sat before it all the rest of that intolerable morning, picking out tunes and experimenting with the stops.

At noon old Van Brink came driving home in his buggy, and his hot and anxious wife began hurrying back and forth between the kitchen and the dining room, bringing in an enormous hot dinner. The farmer had nothing to say to Tommy. He sat there with his napkin tucked in his collar, consuming one dish after the other as fast as his wife brought them in, absorbed and ravenous, like a feeding animal. Now and again Tommy caught the old man's small blue eyes surveying him with an expression which he could not comprehend, but which he didn't like.

Van Brink drove off directly after eating, and his wife withdrew to the kitchen again. With growing resentment, Tommy seized his hat and went out, followed the route of the night before, and reached the village. Entering the only hotel, the Gilbert House, he ordered a cocktail and bought a newspaper; but the drink was shockingly bad, and he couldn't endure the stale dullness of the place long enough to read the paper there.

He had never before in his life suffered from such boredom. He went back to the house, determined to write at once to his uncle and say he couldn't stand it any longer.

And there, rocking on the porch and enjoying the cool of the afternoon, sat Esther.

"Hello!" she said cheerfully.

"Good afternoon," he replied stiffly.

"Well! What makes you look so cross?"

"I've had a rotten day."

"I'm sorry; but it wasn't my fault, was it? You needn't be cross at me."

"It was your fault, in a way. You might have told me what there is to do in this place."

"Oh, but there isn't anything! I'll take you for a walk after supper, if you want."

So after supper, when Mrs. Van Brink had gone back to the kitchen, and her husband, in stocking feet, sat reading his newspaper, Esther and Tommy set out again.

"Shall we go right out in the country?" Esther asked him. "Or would you rather go through the village and see some of the fine houses?"

Tommy preferred the country.

They turned north, followed the dark and quiet street past all the little houses, and into a road soft with dust, under the black shadow of great trees, with a sweet breeze blowing from the meadows.

"One day's enough for you," said Esther. "How would you like to spend *years* here?"

"By Jove! How do you stand it?"

"Well, I won't, any longer than I can help!"

They were going uphill steadily. The fields were left behind, and the pine forest was closing in on them, dark and fragrant.

"This is my favorite walk," said Esther. "I often come here by myself."

"Rather lonely, isn't it?"

"I'm never lonely."

Again that vague alarm came over the boy. He felt defenseless, lost. He dreaded to go farther; but, chattering pleasantly, Esther went on and on, and he had to answer and to follow.

The road grew rougher, and his little comrade stumbled often.

"Hadn't we better turn back?" suggested Tommy. "You'll be tired."

"Oh, no! I don't call *this* far!"

"And it's getting late. Your mother and father—"

She laughed.

"You needn't worry about them! Let's sit down and rest a few minutes, if you like."

There was a great flat rock a little way up the bank from the roadway. Sitting there, they could catch a glimpse of an enormous orange-colored moon through the branches.

"It's nice, isn't it?" said Esther. "And doesn't my ring look pretty in the moonlight?"

She held up a plump little hand for him to see.

"Are you engaged?" he asked, for even he knew that the question was expected of him.

"Yes—to the young man you saw last night in the drug store. It's a secret, though; mommer and popper don't know."

"I hope you'll be happy," said Tommy, after a pause.

"I don't see how I can be," she answered plaintively. "I don't really like him; but oh, dear, what else can I do? Why, I've only seen one real *refined* man in all my life. He was a traveling salesman. He wanted to marry me and go and live in New

York; but popper wouldn't let me. He said I was too young."

"Well, you know, you are, rather. You don't want to be hasty, my dear young lady!"

She sighed.

"I don't know why I'm telling you all this; but I'm so unhappy!"

He felt very sympathetic, but could think of nothing to say.

"I'm going to take off this ring now, while I'm with you," Esther went on. "I want to forget all about Will for a while." She slipped her warm little hand into his. "Oh, Tommy!" she said coaxingly. "Be nice, won't you?"

The light of the moon shone clearly on her pretty upturned face, her white throat. He stared and stared at her. She leaned back, more and more, until her head was resting on his breast and her smooth hair brushed his lips.

The first wave of some immense and terrible emotion, something he had never before experienced, came rushing over him. He clenched his hands, struggling against a fierce desire to push her away.

"What are you doing to me?" he wanted to shout. "What's happening to me? Go away! Get out!"

But she did not stir. She rested against him, contented as a kitten, soft, gentle, and still. Little by little his mood changed, his panic was allayed, and he bent over and kissed her. Then he wanted never to let her go again. He kissed her violently, time after time. He couldn't stop.

A sort of madness possessed him. A terror greater than ever assailed him—a terror of himself. He knew he wasn't to be trusted. He put her aside brusquely and got up.

"Come on!" he said. "It's late. Let's go back!"

V

He sat at the open window of his room that night, oppressed by guilt and dread.

"I shouldn't have kissed her," he said to himself. "Now she'll think I'm in love with her."

He knew well enough that he was not. He disliked her—almost loathed her; she was so soft and clinging, so irresistible and so inferior. He didn't want to see her again.

He hadn't yet been able to devise a suitable attitude when he met her the next

morning. Seeing her so perfectly unmoved helped him, and they sat down to breakfast in friendly accord.

"It's another hot day," she said. "Mommer thought maybe you'd enjoy a picnic."

"A picnic—just you and me?" he asked suspiciously.

She nodded, and waited for his reply, watching his face with candid eyes. He grew red and hot.

"Very nice idea," he said loftily.

He was racking his brains for some means of avoiding the excursion.

"Not if I know it!" he said to himself.

"She won't get me alone again!"

But his reflection in a distant mirror caught his eye. What? Here he was, six feet tall, dressed in absolutely the latest fashion, a thorough man of the world, and yet uneasy in the presence of this sixteen-year-old country girl! "Dumpy," he called her—stolid, ignorant, rustic, in a cheap cotton frock.

His good humor came back. He smiled down upon her kindly, all alarm gone. Let her make love to him if she liked—there was no harm in it.

They started directly after breakfast, walked mile after mile through the fields in the full glare of the hot August sun, up stony hills, through bramble-lined woodland paths, until Tommy, carrying the big lunch basket and a walking stick, and wearing a rather heavy Norfolk jacket—the only correct thing for picnics—was dazed and tired. Not Esther, though; she was as fresh and cheerful as ever.

In the course of time they reached the place predestined by her for lunching—a little clearing on the slope of the pine-covered mountain, a sort of sunny nest in the forest, where a brook ran by, rapid and cool.

When he had at last satisfied his appetite—a strangely hearty and indiscriminate one for such a man of the world—Tommy lay back against a sun-warmed stone, smoking a cigarette and looking up at the bright sky. It was nice to have Esther there, he admitted to himself. It was nice to see her, contented and blessedly quiet, sitting beside him.

He turned his head to see her better. What a round, pretty, white throat she had! And her lashes were almost dark against her cheeks. He was annoyed by a sudden great longing to kiss her again. He tried to put

the thought out of his mind—tried desperately; but in some inexplicable way, even as she sat there with her eyes closed and her little face so tranquil, she conveyed the fact to him that she was waiting to be kissed.

He did it, with a violence surprising to them both. She struggled half-heartedly, then settled down, close to his side, with his arm about her, and said no more. He kissed her again and again, stroked her hair, looked at her in delight. Dear, gentle, ardent little soul! Truly it was an afternoon on Olympus!

Tommy was done for now. She had awakened his innocent, primitive manhood, had aroused in him a feeling which he was too immature to appraise. He believed that he was, that he must be, in love with her. How otherwise explain his joy in kissing her, his immeasurable admiration for her charms?

"By Jove!" he said to himself. "*I'm in love!*"

He said it with amazement, with pride, with profound distress, because his passion tormented him. He was ashamed of it. He knew very well that it was not spontaneous; Esther had forced its growth. He had not wooed and won her; he had been captured in a most obvious way. He was a slave, and he knew and resented it.

Not that Esther was at all a difficult lady to serve. She had no whims, no caprices. She was neither jealous nor exacting. Indeed, she required nothing at all of Tommy. She let him alone. She was very affectionate, whenever he was; but if he were moody or anxious, she was peacefully silent.

There was always an air of content about her. She might have been the personified ideal of the man of forty—the woman who is always responsive, and yet who exacts nothing. Very, very different from the ideal of generous eighteen!

Precious little joy did poor Tommy find in this his first love. He was perplexed and confused; he couldn't imagine any sort of end to it. He couldn't contemplate marrying Esther, and the idea of any other sort of arrangement never occurred to him. In his eyes she was simply a respectable young girl, under her father's roof, not good enough, or not suitable, to be the wife of a man of the world, but far too good to be thought of in any improper way.

He didn't even know what he wanted—whether he wanted to leave her, or whether

he couldn't live without her. He was weary beyond measure, those hot and sleepless August nights.

VI

At last, one evening, there came a sort of crisis. It was a sultry, rainy night, and they were in the little parlor, bored and constrained by the presence of old Van Brink in the next room, with the door open. Esther had been playing hymn tunes on the harmonium, and Tommy had been watching her, feverishly impatient to kiss her. She had stopped playing, and they sat in silence, listening to the squeak of the old man's rocking-chair and the rustle of his newspaper.

The room irritated Tommy by its amazing tastelessness. Even Esther looked different in it, he thought. Outside, under the summer sky, alone with him, she was a goddess. In here, what was she more than the plump, phlegmatic Esther Van Brink?

A door opened, and Mrs. Van Brink came in to her husband, her work in the kitchen finished until the next sunrise. She looked exhausted. It occurred to Tommy, not for the first time, that Esther was not a remarkably kind daughter. He had never yet seen her do any sort of work for her mother.

Immediately, with artless tact, Mrs. Van Brink closed the door. Tommy sprang up and caught Esther in his arms.

"My!" she cried, laughing. "Aren't you in a hurry, though?"

Tommy reddened, painfully aware of his disadvantage.

"I don't know what you'll do to-morrow evening," Esther went on. "Will Egbert's coming to see me."

Tommy could scarcely grasp the idea. An evening without Esther! Another man! He was silent for some time. He realized then that he would rather marry Esther than lose her, than be supplanted by any Will Egbert.

"Look here, Esther!" he said at last. "I know I haven't any right to complain. I'm not—anything to you; but I'd like you to know something. Before I came here, my uncle—"

He paused so long that Esther frowned. "Yes?" she said. "What about your uncle, Tommy?"

"He warned me—told me I couldn't get engaged, or anything of that sort. You understand, don't you, Esther? You see,

I haven't any income. I depend on him, and I *know*, very well, that he'd never consent to—to anything."

She didn't answer.

"I've thought it over a great deal," he went on; "but I don't know what to do exactly."

To his chagrin and surprise, Esther got up and, going back to the harmonium, began to play loud, triumphant hymns. He could not guess her mood. He was afraid he had offended her; and with that a shade of the old magnificence returned.

"Esther darling, you're not angry, are you?" he asked.

"Oh, no," she replied cheerfully; "but I want to think. Let's sing."

She had a book of "College Songs," ugly and tasteless, like everything else in her life, and they sang them, one after the other, until bedtime. In the next room the mother and father listened, proud and pleased.

"Hark to sis!" said old Van Brink. "Sings and plays pretty good, hey, mother?"

"My, yes! It's real sweet!"

"I'll bet you that young man don't see many girls like sis, city or country, hey, mother? He's no call to turn up his nose at our gal, hey?"

"He don't," she answered thoughtfully.

The next morning, at breakfast, as soon as they were alone for a minute, Esther whispered:

"Tommy, I've got a plan! Let's go out on the porch," she suggested aloud, as her mother came in to clear the table.

"Well!" said Tommy, when they were alone again.

"Well!" she repeated. "Come on—sit down and listen. I want you to take me to the city to see your uncle."

"No!" cried Tommy, startled. "No, my dear girl! That wouldn't do at all!"

"It would! I'll be so nice he'll *have* to like me. I thought and thought about it last night. *Please* do, Tommy!"

"But, my dear child, don't you see that you couldn't go off with me that way? You'd—you'd compromise yourself!"

"Not if we got married right away."

"But suppose Uncle James said no?"

"But he wouldn't—especially when he sees how I trust you."

Tommy put forward all the objections he could think of, but she was able to answer them all.

"I'll manage him," she insisted. "Only let me see him! And then, Tommy," she went on, "it's getting horrid for me here. Egbert is jealous. He says he won't give me up, and won't take back his old ring. And"—amazing invention!—"mommer and popper say that you're just trifling with me, and they want me to take back Will. Every one says I'm a silly little fool to think so much of you!" Tears came into her gray eyes.

"Oh, *do*, Tommy, *please*, take me away! I'm so miserable here!"

And at last, because she wept, and because he could see no other way, he agreed to take her.

VII

RELUCTANT and harassed as he was, he couldn't help a certain delight in the adventure. He hadn't yet lost a boyish relish for running away; and this getting up after the others were asleep, stealing downstairs, bag in hand, and meeting Esther in the dark little hall, thrilled him to the marrow.

They hurried through the empty streets, black beneath the shadow of the old trees, and entered the station, where an oil lamp burned. The ticket office was closed; there wasn't a soul in sight. They sat down side by side on a bench, to wait for the New York train.

In her usual way, Esther put her hand in Tommy's. He turned to look down at her in the dim lamplight, and the sight of her flushed, excited little face, combined with the pressure of her hand, nearly brought tears to his eyes. How she trusted him, poor little girl! Leaving her home and her parents and going off with him this way! He swore to himself that she should never be sorry for it; that, even if she were not quite the wife he would have chosen, he would respect her forever for this generous, this noble trust in him.

He had, in short, never in his life been so overwhelmingly asinine. His fair, infantile face was pale from the intense seriousness of his resolutions and the weight of his responsibility. He would at that moment have been ready to assure you that it was he who had implored and persuaded Esther to run away with him—that it was his idea and his wish.

It was midnight when they arrived at the Grand Central. The moment they stepped off the train, a realization of his colossal folly rushed over the boy. The

subtle excitement of the hurrying crowds, the sophistication of this environment, suddenly destroyed his rustic romance, and he grew cold with fright.

What was this that he had done? What was he to do with Esther? He couldn't marry her without a license. He had thought of taking her at once to Uncle James, to convince him on the spot of Esther's desirability as a wife. Uncle James might be asleep; or, if he were awake, he would surely need some preparation. He was courtly toward ladies—ladies with money; but one never knew—

"Oh, Lord!" he thought. "Oh, Lord! What can I do with her?"

They had eloped from the girl's home. He was now and forever responsible for little Esther. There she sat, waiting for his wise decision.

They sat down on a bench in the immense hall, he with his latest thing in traveling bags, Esther with a shabby little wicker suit case. Forlorn, young, weary, they sat in silence—waiting, both of them, for Tommy to become a man.

"I know!" he cried suddenly. "Esther, you go into the ladies' waiting room while I telephone. I have a cousin. I think she'd be willing to do something. At least she'll put you up overnight."

But in the telephone booth his courage fled. He couldn't explain all this over the wire. He ran out and got a taxi, and at one o'clock he arrived at his cousin's little flat uptown.

She was a charming, gracious, good-natured young widow. She got up, put on a dressing gown, and sat listening with angelic patience to Tommy's story; but she could not conceal her horror.

"Oh, Tommy, my dear boy! You're so young! Don't be hasty! Oh, Tommy, don't rush into—anything!"

"Now, look here!" said Tommy, sick with nervousness and alarm. "Don't lecture me, Alison. It's done. Just suggest something. She can't go back now. I'll have to see Uncle James about getting married; but what shall I do now? I can't leave the poor kid sitting there in the Grand Central Station all night."

"No, of course you can't," Alison agreed. "Bring her here, Tommy—and hurry! I'll wait up for her."

She set about making preparations for this most unwelcome guest, thinking and hoping all the time that Tommy might be

saved—that this distressing thing might blow over without hurting him.

She pictured Esther as a poor innocent little rustic, as simple as Tommy. She never saw the girl, and so was never enlightened. She waited for two hours, but no one came. Then, worried, heavy-hearted, she went back to bed.

VIII

TOMMY had hurried back to Esther, and found her just as he had left her—a model of patience and propriety, with her little bag beside her. Though she was pale and heavy-eyed with sleep, she was as neat and fresh as ever. He told her his plan.

"Come on," he said. "Hurry up! Alison said she'd wait for you."

"I'm not going there," she said. "I can't, Tommy."

"You'll have to, dear!"

Her eyes filled with tears.

"I can't! I can't! I just couldn't face a strange woman now. What would she think of me, running away with you like this?"

"But what can I do with you, Esther?"

She clasped his arm and looked up into his face with streaming eyes.

"Oh, Tommy! Please don't leave me! I'm so frightened and so lonely! Don't send me away!"

"But you must be reasonable, sweetheart," he implored. He began to realize how terribly he had mismanaged this affair. He cursed himself. Why hadn't he made plans? "You know we've got to consider your reputation," he said.

"Oh, that doesn't matter!" she cried. "No one'll ever know about it. Only don't go away from me, Tommy! I couldn't bear it!"

He yielded. He was so distressed, so confused, so alarmed, that he had no moral strength to withstand her. He took her to the Tressillon, a quiet, dingy place where he had once or twice had dinner. He took two rooms for them, on different floors, and he registered as "Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Ellinger, Jr." What else could he have done?

He slept soundly, although he hadn't expected to close an eye. The first thing he thought of upon waking was to telephone to Esther's room. He was told that she wasn't there.

He dressed and hurried down to look for her everywhere—in the dining room, the

grill, the lounge; but he couldn't find her. He was seized with panic.

When he found that her bag was still in her room, he resigned himself to wait; but he was angry—more angry than he had ever been in his life.

She came back at lunch time, composed and smiling. He was sitting on the lounge when she entered. He got up, took her arm with a nervous grip, and led her into a quiet corner.

"Look here, Esther!" he said. "You mustn't act like this! Where have you been?"

"Oh, nowhere special—just for a walk."

"I'd planned for us to go to the City Hall and get the license this morning, and get married."

"Oh, Tommy!" she said, with a pout. "I don't want to get married. I'm too young!"

"Don't be silly!" he said impatiently. "We'll have a bite of lunch and then we'll hurry down town."

"I think it's silly to get married. We're too young. What could we live on?"

"You needn't worry about that," he said, wounded. "I dare say I can manage to take care of you."

"I don't think you could, Tommy. We'd only be miserable. No, let's not be married."

"Esther!" he cried, appalled. "What's the matter with you?"

"I think we've made a mistake. Let's not be silly and make it any worse. The best thing would be for us to part. I can look out for myself perfectly well. I know a man here in the city—I dropped in to see him this morning, and he said he'd get me an engagement to go on the stage. He's an advance agent, or something. I met him out in Millersburg. He has lots of pull."

"Don't talk that way!" he thundered. "Don't you realize what you've done? Haven't you enough sense to see that you're compromised?"

"No one knows anything about it, and there's no harm done. I'll write to mommer and tell her I ran away to go on the stage."

"No, you won't!" said Tommy. "I sent them a telegram this morning to say that we were married. I thought we would really be by the time they got the message."

She looked at him in silence.

"Well!" she said at last. "You *are* a fool!"

"I suppose I am," he replied bitterly. "However, it's done now. They know you're here with me, and they think you're my wife, so you'll have to see it through."

"Not I!" she said cheerfully. "I'm not going to marry a kid like you!"

"For God's sake, why did you come away with me?" he cried.

She smiled.

"I guess I liked you," she said.

"Don't you like me now?"

"Don't be silly!" she said. "Of course I do; but I think we're too young to think of marriage. It was a mistake."

She was absolutely incomprehensible to him; but she could read him through and through, and the better she knew him, the greater grew her contempt.

"It was only a joke," she said.

"Is that your idea of a joke? It's a pretty dangerous one."

She shook her head.

"No, it isn't. I knew you were a nice boy. I knew I could trust you. I'll always remember you, Tommy—always. You're the nicest—"

"What do you propose to tell your parents? They'll write to you here, or they may come."

"They won't find me. I'll leave tomorrow morning. Mr. Syles told me of a nice boarding house. You'll go back to your uncle. He'll never know about it, and we'll both forget the whole thing, won't we?"

They went up into her room, and they argued all afternoon. Tommy tried to show her the enormity of her conduct, but she insisted upon regarding it as an escapade. She emphasized her sixteen years. She behaved with an airy childishness which she had never shown before, and which he knew to be false.

He had played the part she had determined he should play, and there was an end to him. Her modest little pocketbook was well stuffed with his money. She was in the city where she wished to be.

Sixteen? Esther sixteen? Preposterous idea! She was as old as the earth.

At last she said she was hungry, and reluctantly he took her downstairs to the dining room, crowded and noisy, with dancing going on to the music of a fiendish orchestra. Gone was his pride, gone was his kindly protectiveness. He was overwhelmed with shame; he saw himself a dupe, when he had fancied himself a hero.

He couldn't eat. He sat there across the table, in sullen wretchedness, keeping his eyes off her detestable face, listening to her calm voice, telling him that it was "better for them both to part now." She was affable, but she made no effort to be kind. She had nothing to say about love, about grief at parting. She placidly ignored their romance. She urged him to be "sensible," and a "good boy." And with every word she made a fresh wound in his quivering, childish soul—scars never to be healed.

He was sitting with his back to the door, and he hadn't seen old Van Brink enter. He had looked up in alarm at a shriek from Esther, and there was that face, convulsed with hatred—hatred for *him!* Then the shot, the crowd, the atrocious sense of unreality, of insane confusion, the pain in his wrist.

Some one had hurried him off in a taxi. He had looked back blankly from the doorway at the brightly lighted room, at an old man held by force from following him. It wasn't, it couldn't be real!

Once again he picked up the newspaper and looked at that shameful headline:

TRAGEDY NARROWLY AVERTED AT HOTEL TRESSILLON

It occurred to young Thomas Ellinger that perhaps the tragedy had not, after all, been averted.

IX

"EVERYTHING passes," runs the old saying, and the contrary is also true. Nothing passes.

If you had looked at that stalwart and serious gentleman in the box, correct, evidently prosperous, with his honest and rather blank gaze, you would certainly have imagined him to be one of those fortunate creatures without a history, a soul without a scar. He was there with an agreeable, well-bred wife and a pretty young daughter, and he was apparently enjoying the play with a temperate and sedate enjoyment—interested, but not very much interested, you know.

And yet he is none other than the black sheep of twenty years ago, the disgraced and abandoned Tommy. Moreover, the actress whom he is watching with so tepid an air is Esther herself, and he is very cunningly concealing a great confusion of feelings.

He had casually suggested going to see her act that evening, as he had done four or

five times before, since he had by chance discovered that Esther and the celebrated Elinor Vaughn were one and the same person. He had no knowledge of the means by which she had risen, but he was by no means surprised to find her at the top. Why shouldn't she be? Indeed, how could she not be? She was certainly born for victory.

Each time that he watched her magnificent outbursts of dramatic passion, her rages and her griefs, he felt a secret and delightful joy. Only imagine what he had escaped! Only think what such a woman, capable of moving the most cynical heart, could have done with him! He looked cautiously at the people about him, saw them stirred to horror, grief, or delight, and he felt himself superior to them all. They didn't know that it was only Esther Van Brink!

He watched her to-night, at the end of her famous second act, winning by heart-breaking entreaties the mercy of a vindictive and obdurate husband. Never could he have withstood her. He would have been lost!

The curtain fell, rose again, fell, and she came out to stand for a moment before the footlights, bowing, smiling a little wearily; and then she saw him.

He drew back hastily, but it was too late. When she came before the curtain again, she looked at him and smiled. Before the third act began, a boy came to the box with a note:

Please, Tommy, come behind and see me for a moment.

ESTHER.

"It seems she's some one I used to know," he explained to his wife. She raised her eyebrows and smiled politely, but he knew she wasn't satisfied. "I suppose I'll have to go," he said.

"Oh, by all means!" replied his wife. "Alice and I won't wait."

He was uneasy and annoyed. That was just like Esther—no consideration!

He found her in her dressing room, with a crowd of people, but she sent them all away.

"He's an awfully old friend," she explained, "and very shy. I'll never be able to catch him again."

The little country girl had certainly become a handsome woman, he reflected, and she had lost none of her impudent charm, her mocking tranquillity.

"Well, Tommy!" she said.

"Well!" he answered, and he had exactly his old air of a boy acting the man of the world.

"My, you've got on!" she said admiringly. "You're really splendid, Tommy! Are you a millionaire?"

"No," he answered, flushing, well aware that she was laughing at him. "I'm in business."

"How did you do that?"

Naturally he didn't care to talk about his heroic effort to rehabilitate himself—how he had actually found himself a job, and won his alarming uncle's forgiveness for his one wickedness by patient industry and some years of complete self-effacement.

"And you're married, if my eyes do not betray me."

"Yes, I'm married," he answered stiffly.

He wasn't going to permit any Esther on earth to make light of that respectable and very happy union.

"Oh, Tommy!" she sighed. "I'm glad! I'm glad it's all turned out so well for you—and for me, too. I don't believe I would ever have become the actress I am if it

hadn't been for all I suffered through your desertion."

"What?" he cried, astounded. "My desertion?"

And there were actually tears in her eyes.

"Yes," she said. "You nearly broke my heart, but it made me."

He could scarcely believe his ears.

"But—but—" he stammered, with a feeble effort to remind her of her own treachery.

"I only wanted to see you and tell you that I forgave you long ago, Tommy—forgave you frankly and freely. I owe my success to that suffering."

She held out her hand. He grasped it, and hurriedly took his leave. She forgave him! She forgave him his desertion, which had nearly broken her heart!

He stopped in the street outside the theater, ready to denounce her to the silent sky; but in spite of himself began to smile, with reluctance, with an immense and grudging admiration.

"Upon my word!" he said aloud. "What a woman!"

LOVE'S TEMPERATURE

If Sylvia flashes me her smile,
The lowering clouds are straightway put to flight,
The day grows all resplendent with delight;
Above a glittering world the gorgeous night
Parades a sky barbarically bright.
Then proudly gloom and darkness I disdain,
So glorified am I the while.

If Sylvia turns her eyes on me
The whole earth is as lovely as in spring,
When sap flows upward and the thrushes sing,
When airs, a-thrill with April's whispering,
Caressingly about my temples cling.
Though winter clamor at the shuttered pane,
My heart knows springtime's ecstasy.

But when she lays her lips on mine,
I cannot hear if song or silence hold,
I cannot tell if hours be black or gold,
I do not care if it be warm or cold
Or sun or fog or snow the earth enfold.
In some withholden place, some other plane,
I feel eternal sunlight shine!

Nelle Richmond Eberhart

The Harbor of Rest

CAPTAIN JOHN PAGE'S LAST VOYAGE THROUGH THE STORMY
SEA OF LIFE

By Kenneth Howell

IN heavy broadcloth suits, in neat serge, in blue jackets with small buttons of brass, the group of ten or twelve old men waited at the curb in a quiet side street. The air of the early evening was so still that a dense cloud of smoke, curling lazily in upward spirals from pipes and cigars, hovered above their heads. These men, years before, had smoked their tobacco on the lofty quarter-decks of sailing ships, in the comfortable saloons of small freight and passenger steamers, on the solidly built bridges of wandering tramps.

A special bus chartered for the yearly theater party swung heavily around the corner and stopped opposite the group. The conductor, a bit impudently, but for all that smiling a welcome, called out:

"Come now, mates, all aboard! Watch your step there, skipper!"

The climb to the upper deck was not easy for most of them. It caused much grunting, sudden hasty grasping of the hand rail, here and there a laugh, a smothered sigh hastily changed to a chuckle; for this was a great night, a night of pleasure stolen from the dull sequence of nights that marched inexorably on to the end of the voyage—a night for happiness, not to be marred by even a passing sigh.

As Captain John Page went forward to the front seat, he reflected with a slight shock that this was his ninth annual celebration. He had left the sea, had stepped off the bridge of his cherished Hyacinth for the last time, just after his seventieth birthday. Nine years ago! Nine years of steady decline, entirely physical, but overwhelming, terrifying.

It was not the fear of death. Death! He had faced and evaded that, had become almost callous to it in forty-five years of sail and steam over the oceans of the earth.

No, his chances taken in the past had bred in him a contemptuous indifference to death. Risks of that sort could be faced, taken coolly, prepared against, even nullified, by courage, foresight, the painstaking care of a master mariner.

Then, too, the personal fear of dying by catastrophe at sea was invariably dwarfed in the larger consideration of a seaman's responsibility for his men and his ship. The ship—that was the beginning and the middle and the end. That was his life. While the ship lived there was no death. But now for nine years there had been no ship, no responsibility to demand skill and faithfulness, just a daily, hourly, waiting for the end. Intolerable passivity!

"It's the heart, Captain John—years, probably; perhaps sooner," was the final verdict of the examining physician, a friend. It had left Captain Page for the first time in his life empty of hope. More than once after that he discussed it with a friend on the broad veranda of the home.

"You see, captain," he would say, "we sailors risk much in our calling, but we never gamble. We are not adventurers, not plungers; so we face the prospect of our passing, strengthened by fitness, by our belief in ourselves, and by faith in the stanchness of a living ship. But now, you see, I am a gambler. There is no security, nothing for me to do, nothing that I can do. Oh, yes, I can wait—wait!"

And he was waiting now as the bus turned into Fifth Avenue and joined the down-town column. As he sat there looking out over the rail, the hurrying crowds on the sidewalk, the darting taxicabs, and the smooth-running private cars receded to a dim background, and he became acutely aware of lights—glaring headlights that suddenly grew enormous and then van-

ished; high street lamps in soothing regularity; mellow lights of shop windows.

The top of the bus swayed gently, and Captain Page looked straight ahead at a red tail lamp. He stared fixedly at it, and it was the light of an incoming ship. His head dropped forward. Dimly he saw a group of twinkling lights—growing fainter—dropping away aft—shining across miles of dark water in the outer roadstead of a great South American port.

He felt on his face the fresh night breeze, cooled by thousands of miles of sea. He looked across the water and saw the pilot climbing aboard his tug. He strode to the telegraph and swung the handle to "slow ahead." A barely perceptible shudder ran through the fabric of the Hyacinth. Then, as "half ahead" was indicated on the dial, the movement quickened. A few minutes later the ship vibrated to "full ahead."

Captain Page paced steadily athwart ship, halting now and then at the wheel for a word with the mate—a big, rawboned fellow picked up from the beach at Buenos Aires to replace a man who had been taken ashore to a hospital. The captain watched him narrowly as he worked. There was usually some flaw to be expected in these men who were found shipless in Buenos Aires. The port had a bad name for beach combers who could sign on a ship with sheaves of proper discharges, with hospital records, with unassailable reasons for being "on the beach"; and yet in the course of a voyage, often before a ship was clear of the harbor, the rotten spot would be disclosed—drink, laziness, ill health, but rarely inability.

"No, he seems to do his work smartly," thought Captain Page. "Perhaps he will be the exception."

He glanced off over the sea to starboard, balancing instinctively as the first slow swell of the South Atlantic loomed dark, uncrested, under the bow of the old tramp steamer. She rose easily to it and slid down its seaward side. Two lines of foam streamed out from the bow, pure white against the somber black of the water. A gentle hiss came up to the bridge like the suppressed sigh of some sleeping beast. The voyage was begun.

II

THE days lengthened into weeks, and the old ship ambled on toward her first port of call in the Virgin Islands. Like the tracing

of a pencil across the glazed surface of a chart, she left her wake, white, narrow, uncurved, bisecting the wide level of the sea. Parallel to the line of white, there trailed from her funnel a great smear of black smoke slowly revolving on its own axis, standing out sharp against the cloudless sky.

Heavy with age she rolled on, creaking, protesting. In the perfect stillness of the nights the wheeze and pant of her engines sounded like the labored sigh of some creature urged on, driven, forced beyond the strength and endurance of its years. And as John Page observed his ship, there sprang up between ship and master one more common bond, another link in the chain of years.

"I, too, have grown tired and old," he thought. "My ship and I have grown old together."

The feeling came over him, a suggestion here, a thought there, that this might be his last voyage. Strangely, the idea did not sadden him. Gradually his mind focused on the great port that lay at the end of the voyage, beyond the Virgin Islands in their warm West Indian sea, far up north, facing to eastward the broad expanse of the northern ocean. There was the end, and it called him—called him to steer his ship in and drop anchor.

One day, at noon, Barbados rose up out of the sea far off on the port side. The Hyacinth passed close enough for the men to see a faint smoky line where the low surf pounded on the beach.

Then, after a succession of islands, the tramp steered a winding course into the deep water bay at St. Thomas. Before her anchor was dropped she was surrounded by a fleet of small boats. The West Indian negroes swarmed over the side, crying their wares. Captain Page ordered the anchor raised almost at once, and the ship steamed slowly up the bay to a dock from which a British bark was being towed.

"We're lucky," he remarked to the second mate. "We won't be here long. There is little business to be done. I really don't see why we made this port."

"Lots of fruit and some fresh stores, sir," said the second. "It's a nice little town. I've been here before. The rum is horrible, but they sell good wine. Going ashore right away, sir?"

The captain nodded and went into the wheel house.

The light cargo was taken on by night-fall, and at eight o'clock next morning the Hyacinth moved out to an anchorage, where she waited with steam up, pouring thick clouds of smoke from her squat funnel. About noon the men on deck watched a small launch sheer off from the dock and turn its slender bow toward the ship. Immaculate in the drill of the tropics, Captain Page came up the sea ladder. After a hasty word with the chief engineer, he went directly up on the bridge. He stood for a moment by the rail, and then frowned blackly as the new mate appeared in the door of the chart room.

In the bright glare of noon, so plainly stamped on his face that Captain Page wondered why he had not read it at first, was the unmistakable sign of the man's particular flaw. It showed on the puffy cheeks, in the tremulous lips, and, most of all, in the bleared, half open eyes.

The mate straightened as he saw the captain. There was nothing said, nothing that should have been said. John Page merely stared straight at the first officer of the Hyacinth in a long, searching glance that covered every detail.

It was an old story to him, uncovering the rotten spot in a man from the beach. He even found time to smile to himself in mild deprecation that this discovery should send a suggestion of dismay to his heart. What, after all, did it matter?

From this questioning he flinched a little as the answer followed—he felt old. The presence of a drunken first officer, in itself, was nothing especially menacing. It was a matter of tactful discipline, or, at the most, of watchfulness on the part of the master; but he felt old. He was not infirm, not unsound in any way—just old, a little uneasy, shrinking perceptibly from this added responsibility. It was as if the weak joint in the ship's officer had been transferred to some vital part of the ship itself, and he, John Page, had one more difficulty, one more danger in the course he had to steer before he could take his old ship into the great port that lay far to the north.

His voice was even, unruffled, as he spoke to the mate.

"Mr. Nordstrom, have the ship cleared at once. We are leaving in ten minutes."

The man stared stupidly at him.

"I don't understand you, sir," he said thickly.

Captain Page raised his voice slightly as he repeated his order.

"These bumboat men and those laundresses aft—get them over the side at once; the ship is going out. Come, Mr. Nordstrom, do you hear me?"

The mate slouched down the stairs and waved his arms vaguely at the chattering crowd of petty traders. He swore. They smiled at his abuse, and, gathering up their shells and coral trinkets, leisurely climbed over the rail and dropped down the ladder into the boats.

As the mate made his way forward, to fish up the anchor, Captain Page looked gravely after him; but Nordstrom was apparently clear enough as far as his work was concerned. In twenty minutes the Hyacinth swung around in a wide circle, and, running slowly through the fleet of small boats, coral dealers, fruit men, traders of every description, headed out for the entrance of the harbor.

Many times Captain Page had taken his ship out of this bay, but now, as he stood by the helmsman, the feeling came over him again—subtle, hardly to be noticed, certainly not to be analyzed—that this voyage would be his last. It was a strange mental undercurrent for a practical seaman. There was no reflection behind it, no thought of any sort; it carried no fear, nor even regret, and its single effect was to direct the captain's mind still more intensely to the harbor that marked the end of the voyage. There was the goal, there was rest for himself, rest for the ship—safe anchorage in port.

He stepped to one side and pulled the lanyard of the whistle in a prolonged salute to the town. The man at the wheel grinned covertly, and Captain Page knew that the sailor was thinking of the unfailing disgust of the engineers below, trying to keep a head of steam in "the leaky tin boilers of this blasted tramp."

The grin widened as the man stole a glance aft. While the echoes were still rolling back from the hills, there in the door of the starboard passageway stood the chief engineer and the first assistant, resignation in the face of one, wrath blazing in the eyes of the other. The second mate, on watch, smiled down at them from the bridge.

"Queer crowd, sir, the Black Gang," he remarked.

"Eh, what's that, Mr. Rogers? Oh, yes,

in a manner of speaking; but this outfit is satisfactory, entirely. I hope—"

Captain Page stopped abruptly as he thought of Nordstrom. It surprised him, even disquieted him vaguely, that the untrustworthiness of a temporary officer should so affect him. It was a weakness in the one man on the ship who could afford no weakness.

Rogers looked at the short, bowed figure of John Page, at the stooping shoulders, at the weather-seamed face, the white hair, the eyes a little dim, and it seemed to strike him suddenly that this sea captain was worn, old, far from strong. His eyes softened as he said impulsively:

"You can depend on me, sir, for any amount of extra work!"

Captain Page looked at him sharply and then turned for a last look about the harbor.

The clear waters of the bay, glittering under the blinding glare of the midday sun, resembled a gigantic mirror, reflecting the shattered rays in great flecks of gold and silver. The surrounding hills, rising sharply just beyond the line of the shore, lost their brilliant green and appeared black in contrast to the sky and bay. Tall coco palms stood out in heavy relief against the turquoise blue of the serene, unclouded vault above. The low roofs of the town, pink, blue, brown, flashed as a whole into a green burst of color.

The battered tramp with her high, rusty sides steamed out of the harbor mouth slowly, as if reluctant to leave the shelter of this quiet West Indian port for the rigor of northern seas. In two hours the island lay dead astern, dimly visible like a low-hanging cloud.

At six o'clock Captain Page left his stateroom and went up on the bridge for his customary tramp outside the door of the chart room, eight paces forward, eight paces aft. He stopped short in the doorway and then spoke calmly through tightened lips:

"Mr. Nordstrom!"

The sailor at the wheel frowned stupidly to conceal a smile and then stared hard at the compass. The mate, clearly startled, spun around on his heel and walked up to the captain. The two men stood there a moment in silence. Nordstrom, bulky, immense in his soft white shirt, towered over the slight figure of his commander. It seemed as if he had a mad idea of adopting a bullying attitude toward this rather

feeble-looking master. Then he evidently changed his mind; but there was a shade of contempt in his bearing as the other spoke.

"While you are on my ship, Mr. Nordstrom," said the captain, "never again let me find you drunk while on duty. You will go to your cabin at once. On your four to eight watch to-morrow morning you will be sober, or I shall log you and have you confined to your quarters. I will relieve you now."

The man's heavy, congested face grew crimson. He half raised an enormous fist, but Captain Page was already standing by the wheel, looking forward over the smooth sea with a face that was perfectly calm. He did not turn around as the mate lurched past his back. A moment later there was the loud crash of a door slammed on the port side of the bridge. The helmsman, at a low word from Captain Page, slowly played the spokes through bronzed hands.

III

THE voyage wore on in a succession of days and nights that passed rapidly, as if time itself shared the eagerness of the old Hyacinth to reach the end of her long pilgrimage under the banner of trade. As the ship steamed north, the nights grew chill and sharp, with blustery winds. The days were overcast. The clear blue water of the tropic seas assumed a dull, somber gray under the winter sky of the North Atlantic. The smoke from the tramp's funnel was seized by brisk gusts of wind that tore it apart viciously and spread it broadcast, whirling aft in shreds and spiral filaments of gray.

On the seventh night out from St. Thomas, the sky, black, unrelieved by the faintest glimmer of a star, was indistinguishable from the sea save for the dim white streak of foam that appeared and vanished astern, like the ghostly wake of an invisible ship. From time to time the regular vibration of the tramp was interrupted by a furious, racking grind, as the propeller, momentarily thrust up from the sea, revolved wildly.

Captain Page got out of bed at six in the morning, as he had done for years, and went at once into his tiny bathroom.

"Whew!" he exclaimed aloud. "We've run into a piece of weather. The ship is dancing!"

He opened the port part way, and drew back in surprise as a thin stream of water

sluiced hissing through the narrow aperture. He closed the glass hastily, and went back to his stateroom to dress.

The pantryman came in with his jug of coffee. The boy's voice was thick with sleep as he said:

"Good morning, sir."

He stood holding the jug while the captain drank from a large cup.

"You made this, didn't you, Angelo? What's the trouble? It's poor stuff."

"The first mess, she spill, *capitan*. I mak' thees in horry. The galley—"

He broke off abruptly as the other handed back the cup and nodded his head toward the door.

After a moment of indecision, the captain decided against shaving. Buttoning on a heavy peacoat, he went immediately to the bridge. The Hyacinth was steaming at moderate speed through heavy head seas that swept down on her straight from the north, lagging behind a wind that carried their crests up to be shattered against the heavy plate glass windows of the wheel house.

The old ship lumbered doggedly on. She would rear sharply, with her bow flung high toward the dark northern sky; then, as the wave roared aft, she would drop into the hollow with the crash of two thousand tons of steel falling from a vast height into the hard mass of resisting water. She would bury her nose in a whirling smother of white foam; then, pausing a moment, as if to take breath for her great effort, she would lurch shuddering out of the welter and climb the following sea, shaking, quivering, shedding the water in cataracts from her foredeck and fore-castle head.

The heart of old Captain Page glowed as he watched her battle against these first thrusts of the North Atlantic. He smiled grimly. Yes, she was old, she was ugly to see—strained, battered, shapeless, almost, in comparison with modern steamers—but by Heaven she was dependable! That was her description, the first word and the last. Grace, beauty of lines, stateliness—she had none of these; but in her ten years of service under the command of John Page she had done her work faithfully.

He turned to the mate.

"Mr. Nordstrom, have the bosun look over the lashings on No. 2 lifeboat. He'd better break out some new lines."

The mate nodded, and stepped out on the wing of the bridge to whistle for the

seaman on watch. A dim gray sheen spread over the sea, faintly lighting the tumbling waters with the feeble rays of an invisible sunrise.

All that day the ship drove on—climb, lunge forward, drop, fight clear, and climb. Hour after hour passed, under an opaque sky, and at four in the afternoon Captain Page, after a short sleep in his berth, came on the bridge to take his ship through the storm. He was swathed and muffled from head to foot in a queer, unnamable mixture of garments. A black sou'wester and the upturned collar of an oilskin jacket hid his face, except for a narrow crack through which his gray eyes stared out, steadily, all-seeingly, on the sky, on the sea, and on his ship.

It was the beginning of the first mate's watch, the four-to-eight watch in the afternoon, and the tall figure of Nordstrom, gigantic in its grotesque-looking storm rig, stood close by the wheel. He shouted some sort of acknowledgment of the captain's presence, but the words were lost in the scream of the wind and the deluge of white water driving against the salt-crustured woodwork of the bridge. Then he stepped aside and reached out, groping blindly with open hands. Captain Page saw his fingers close on the whistle lanyard. Deep-toned, resonant, but dimly heard, as if from a distant ship, the whistle of the tramp sounded in a long wail that throbbed and moaned below the higher pitch of wind and the steady underlying roar of crashing seas.

Young Rogers appeared suddenly in the chart room door and silently leaped for the first mate. The astounding sight of Captain Page clinging to Nordstrom's extended arm, swinging wildly to the heave of the ship, with his feet now touching the deck, now dangling in the air, was all the second mate needed.

Nordstrom went down. He was very drunk. Captain Page, sprawling on the deck beside him, grasped Rogers's hand, and got swiftly to his feet.

The veteran's face was white, and a smear of blood was streaked across his forehead. Even in the second's bewildered excitement, the sight brought a stab of pity into his heart for this old seaman.

"Are you all right, sir?" he cried.

The other nodded.

"Call the bosun, Mr. Rogers, and a man. Lock this fellow in his berth; then go below yourself. I'm taking the ship."

Rogers turned away. Then, twisting his head around over his shoulder, he called out doubtfully:

"You've hurt your head, sir. Better go below for—"

The captain shook his head impatiently and took his place beside the helmsman.

IV

As the hours passed slowly, and the black veil of night stole over the dark stretches of the sea, Captain Page realized that this was likely to be as bad a storm as he had ever experienced in Atlantic waters. For the first time a slight misgiving, just a faint suggestion of doubt, came treacherously into his thoughts.

It was not doubt of his ship, or of the ship's company, in spite of the collapse of the mate. No, the old Hyacinth was stanch, a full-powered ship, and the men were above the average of the crews of casual tramps. The distrust lay closer, and was more difficult to banish than if it were of men or ship.

Nay, it was impossible to banish! It presented little opportunity for grasping it and hurling it back to whatever sinister source it had sprung from. For the distrust, this undermining sense of fear, was the lack of confidence that John Page, the man, held in Captain Page.

It seemed to him as if he was removed from the ship, and yet was able to see the master faltering at his task—faltering by reason of old age, which had no place on the sea. The black seas looming up out of the night, crested deep with seething white, hurling high the battered tramp like a plank of wood, only to drop her heavily in the trough, as if in contempt, seemed aimed in sheer malignance at the weary heart of an old man. The gale that drove the waves, lashing them to tremendous size and then with fiercer gusts flattening them as they bore down on the laboring ship, seemed a part of the general mischance that would sweep him off the sea with a record blackened at its very end.

Through the long hours the captain stood by the wheel, directing the helmsman, a tense, thin shape that stared blindly out into the night. The third mate came on watch. His four hours passed, and at midnight he was relieved by the second.

For three hours young Rogers kept silence; then at last he approached the captain and asked him in a shrill yell to go be-

low and get some rest. Captain Page shook his head. He staggered against a sudden heave of the ship to the engine room speaking tube; but he gave no signal. He leaned against the brass base of the telegraph, and clutched it desperately as the Hyacinth failed to rise to a great sea that reared a foaming crest high over the bow and broke with a crash on the foredeck. The iron deck drummed under the impact. The old tramp quivered like some mortally stricken animal, and sheered suddenly away from the following wave.

"Hard over!" the captain shouted.

The man at the wheel was shouldered aside by the second mate. The two men held her from falling away into the trough; but when she came back, at a sign from Captain Page, Rogers remained at the wheel.

Just before dawn the wind seemed to grow fiercer. As a faint luminous glow appeared in the east, the storm reached its height and held it. It never slackened for an instant. Toward the pale light behind the eastern cloud banks the seas showed in great wide reaches of somber gray and white. Then everything that had been visible—the clouds, the water, the ship itself—vanished in a thick curtain of snow and sleet that came horizontally off the sea, mixed with the salt spume torn from the foaming tops of endless waves.

The ship fought blindly on, dogged, racked. To her master, the grim-faced man on her bridge, she appeared suddenly, for one long-drawn-out moment of detached vision, as if seen from a distance, immeasurably remote, a shadow of life, a wraith, helpless, lost in a tortured universe of wind and sea.

He spoke down the tube, and a faint voice from the engine room answered:

"Chief engineer speaking—all right below—how is ship making out?"

The stiff lips of John Page parted in a grin, the cold, vicious leer of a fighting man. He put his mouth close to the tube and yelled down to his engineer:

"All right on deck—ship acting splendidly—will ride it out!"

And the old tramp lived up to the confidence of her commander. She did ride it out.

For thirty hours she battled on, held to her course by the indomitable will of Captain Page. He never left the bridge. Relief after relief came on duty and found

the little old shipmaster at his work. In the midst of their fears, their defiance, their jests—their various reactions to the menace of this storm—they found time to steal short glances into the haggard countenance of Captain Page. Two bleared eyes, narrow slits in a furrowed face of granite, studied the sea dispassionately. A low, dull voice from time to time directed the seaman at the wheel. A cup of coffee slowly drained, a thick beef sandwich, and again the same unswerving scrutiny of the angry ocean.

It was toward the end of the midday watch that the storm visibly lost the height of its fury. It blew itself out in a few more hours of irregular, intense squalls. The seas still ran high, but the wind was dying.

Suddenly the sun broke feebly through the clouds, low in the western sky. Young Rogers grinned as a faint cheer sounded from somewhere aft. For a moment the sunset showed, painting the tossing waters with great splashes of crimson and gold that flashed and glittered in the hollows of the seas.

The captain stared through bloodshot eyes, first out over the surface of the sea toward the western horizon, then toward the north, and then he glanced aft over his ship. A group of engineers standing by No. 2 hatch were watching him curiously.

He stumbled slightly as he stepped to the side of the second mate. He stood there for a moment in silence, and at last spoke hoarsely in a sort of whisper.

"I'm going below, Rogers," he said. "If I'm needed for anything, call me immediately."

As he reached the stairway, he had a confused impression that the second had sworn softly.

V

PAST two great sentinel headlands the Hyacinth steamed slowly into the harbor. Captain Page stood close to the wheel, now and again giving a low word to the helmsman. The slight hissing at the bows and the steady beat of the propeller alone broke the perfect stillness that prevailed. The old captain passed a shaking hand across his eyes.

"What—what port is this?" he whispered to himself.

There came no answer. He stared wearily out into the twilight, out over the smooth waters of the harbor, straight into the splen-

dor of the sky where the sun had set. Then, almost without volition, the usual orders came quietly from his lips, and he heard the anchor chain clanking from the windlass.

With the homely sound came a great flow of courage into the heart of John Page—courage blended with a sense of exquisite beauty, the courage of a master mariner, the dogged courage of the old ship, the sense of beauty in this port that had no name, no latitude, no longitude.

The advancing shadows of the night crept over the nameless harbor, painting on the surface of the roadstead a rippling cover of dull black. The captain stared down into the water close to the ship, and saw the faint reflection of a star, distant, fixed, seeming as far off, in its reflection in the depths of this dark bay, as in the high vault of the night sky.

Like a stupendous procession of things unimaginable, majestic, awful, overwhelming, there in the mirror of the harbor, one at a time and group by group, came the glimmer of the stars, studding the quiet waters with silver points.

Captain Page lifted his eyes to the ship. Steadily, foot by foot, he looked over her, fore and aft, port to starboard. Suddenly he felt as never before that he had indeed brought his last command into port. There she lay at anchor, at rest, swinging gently in the murmuring slack of the tide—the old Hyacinth, his sweetheart, his faith, his love.

She seemed to sigh under the benediction of his gaze. They had kept the faith together—the faith of the sea, the faith of a ship, the faith of a mariner.

With his head bent back, the captain looked up into the heavens. He was alone. Stars—silver stars—myriads of stars—the stars he had steered by over the oceans of the world! Again he whispered softly:

"What port is this?"

And, like a benediction, the answer came, clear, true, unmistakable:

"The Harbor of Rest."

As the bus lumbered to a full stop, there came a shuffling of feet on the upper deck and a murmur of hoarse voices.

"Come, John—wake up," some one called.

A friendly hand fell on the shoulder of Captain Page; but the huddled figure did not move. The blinding glare of a street light fell on the face of Lang, thirty years

in Eastern seas; on Cunningham, with his record of forty years in sail; on Thompson, who had lost his last command, the tramp Zanzibar, in a gale off Barnegat. It passed on and on, lighting up face after face, revealing on each the shadow of its former strength and power, recalled now, reborn for a second's flash, in the presence of a shipmate's death.

Green seas, sullen gray seas of northern oceans, the deep blue of tropic waters, beaches of distant islands, harbors, ships. Then the solemn march of memory faded; the faint harmony of the sea died out. The sounds of the city came back—the dull purring of motors, the harsh scream of an elevated train, fragments of conversation from the sidewalk.

The Strong Man

THE STRANGE TESTING OF THE SPIRIT OF STEVE KILRAINE,
MAIL CARRIER

By John D. Swain

INEVITABLY Steve Kilraine and Amos Harper would fight it out. In the absence of both men, the impending clash was the predominant topic of much drawling conversation in the general store at Gum Fork, which was also the post office.

People thought it would be on account of Susie McKinley, a slip of an Ozark girl with soft blue eyes that were as fresh and clean as a mountain flower. Between Steve, who was only twenty-one, and Susie, there was no spoken engagement—just the shy, secretive attachment of two self-conscious, young, and virginal creatures who, by some infinitely mysterious destiny, appeared to belong one to the other.

"I kind of wish you'd try to keep outen the road of Amos Harper," Susie said, not looking at Steve. "Folks say he's got a cantankerous disposition, jest like his pap-py has."

The mail stage, a three-seated affair drawn by mules, rolled pleasantly down the quarter-mile descent along the rocky road that twisted into Gum Fork. With one foot on the softly scraping brake, Steve leaned back in his driver's seat. He breathed deeply of the balmy air, scented with the myriad of perfumes of the emerald hills.

"Them greens," he remarked to Susie, referring to the basket that was beneath her feet as she sat beside him. "Did you git a fair pickin'?"

At his avoidance of a direct reply to the girl's plea, Steve Kilraine was conscious of a growing embarrassment. Men of his strain did not discuss such things with women.

"Fair to middlin' pickin'," Susie replied, almost mechanically.

Steve had picked her up half a mile back. Since he left Pineville, forty miles away, he had been hoping that he might meet her, as he had done already three times within a month. At Allmonds, where he had eaten his midday meal and changed teams, he had discharged the lone passenger he had carried. It was inexpressibly more pleasant to come swaying down the road into town with no one except Susie McKinley.

In some remote cross of Celtic ancestry, Steve had received a heritage that enabled him to envision his rickety mountain wagon as a gilded coach and caparisoned four. With such men women must be firm.

"You got a reputation, Steve Kilraine, fer bein' as strong as a horse, and it makes you plumb off-headed," said Susie, with the merest quiver of her small rounded chin. "Whar'd you be if Amos Harper stuck a knife inter you?"

A swelling happiness rose in the boy's breast. For the first time he was able to persuade himself that she cared, as he mentally phrased it, "more than a snap of her finger."

"Well," he said, with a reddening color

under his tan and freckles, "he might kill me, but he shore cain't eat me—that's sartin!"

Instantly he was aware that his levity had struck a wrong key. An overhanging bough of lilac swished against the seat, and he was able to break off a redolent bloom.

"Purtiest smell that grows anywhere on airth," he observed awkwardly. "Only trouble is thet it gives you a sort o' lonesome hankerin', don't it?"

II

At the store Steve hitched his mules and unstrapped the mail sacks from the back end of the vehicle. From down the road there was a collection of parcel post packages addressed, for the most part, to Seth Galbraith, the storekeeper. Slowly the mountain folk were coming to realize that their government was serving them, even as it exacted service in the form of taxes and in the shouldering of army rifles. A crate of eggs, a tub of butter, a slab of hog meat, partook of the same inviolable security of a stamped and sealed letter.

In this carrier service Steve Kilrairie took an immense pride. Upon the death of his father, three years before, he had shrunk from the solitary life in the lonely cabin, from the nearly futile labor of the steep, rocky farm he had inherited. In time he meant to return to his rugged acres. Vaguely he thought that sheep might do well upon the slopes.

Directly after the funeral, the man who held the mail contract between Gum Fork and Pineville had given Steve the job of driving stage. The pay of forty dollars a month was princely, but the honor was regal. A dozen men had coveted the place, but the contractor had known three generations of Kilrairies—had known them for their rigid honesty, for the physical strength and energy that flowed in their blood.

The moral responsibility of the job had, at first, been a mighty, omnipresent thought. Seth Galbraith's sonorous voice had administered the government oath employing Steve in the care, custody, and conveyance of the mail. With upraised right hand, the boy, pale and grave, had sworn to perform faithfully all the required duties, and to abstain from everything forbidden by the laws in relation to post offices and post roads.

Later on, all this had slipped into some obscure recess of Steve Kilrairie's mind,

and there remained to him only the wine-like joy of perfect freedom, of perennial delight in the high, grayish roads sweeping above blue valleys and stretching like ribbons through the dark green of wooded mountain spurs.

On alternate nights he slept in Gum Fork and in Pineville; and in their scant pretense of sophistication he had the feeling that he was on a never-ending vacation. It was only a temporary, if enjoyable, truancy from the land, the trees, and the solitude to which he had been born. No Kilrairie within the memory of Steve's father had lived in a town. Certainly not one, in peace times, had served Uncle Sam.

Coming around the rear wheels with the mail bags over his shoulder, Steve was intensely satisfied that Susie had not ridden up to the store with him; that she had alighted just beyond the town, at the shelf of land which marked the limit of her family's farm and the site of its white-painted dwelling. In the little gathering of men and boys upon the porch of the store he caught sight of the fallow, lupine face of Amos Harper.

Every one, except Harper, spoke pleasantly to Steve—with, he thought, too much of an air of unconcern. It was as if they all were trying to mask their curiosity under a casual manner. Some one asked him if the ford had risen at Big Bend. As he halted for a moment to answer, he was aware that Amos Harper was looking at him steadily with heavy, dark eyes.

A queer silence was upon the group. Striding to the rear of the store with his burden, Steve wondered if Amos Harper had been talking behind his back. From behind the partition, where he dropped his sacks, he heard the shuffling of feet in the store, and he knew that the general inward movement to await the distribution of the mail had begun. Harper was inside. Steve heard his voice pitched in a creaking laugh.

Suddenly Steve realized that he was seized with a slight trembling, and that his mouth was dry. The Harpers were not like the men of Coldwell County. Old Elijah Harper, nearing sixty, and Amos Harper, in his middle thirties, both bore the same stamp. Tall, thin-jawed, with prominent yellowed teeth, they had always reminded Steve of two timber wolves.

They had moved into the county within the year, coming from Kentucky. Following after them had come a rumor, which no

one had ever traced down, that old Harper had murdered a man—had knifed him. Nothing more was known. No questions had been asked.

The Harpers themselves never spoke of their past. No man had heard from their lips a single reference to their life before they had come into the county. Together, father and son, they had rented a run down place several miles beyond Gum Fork and away from any near neighbors, and had farmed it in more or less haphazard fashion.

Had Amos Harper not started paying court to Susie McKinley, Steve would have had no concern in the man. As it was, his animosity had risen only as it had grown undeniably plain that Harper regarded him as an enemy. Steve was sure that Susie had received Harper's visits and attentions without encouraging him.

A chilling idea struck Steve.

"She asked me what I'd do if Amos stuck me with a knife," he reminded himself silently.

Harper might have been making threats. Steve recalled the oddness, the unnaturalness, of the greetings from the loungers on the store porch. Something inside the boy's breast began to creep.

At Pineville he had once been drawn into a general rumpus with a brawling crowd of zinc miners turbulent with corn liquor—a rough, flying-fist battle that had been conducted with some rude regard for sportsmanship. The miners had been decent men, basically. The latent muscular energy that slept in Steve's flat muscles had sprung awake, and he had easily handled the men who came at him successively. Upon that occasion, his sole experience in combat, he had felt nothing of the uncanny shivering sensation that was now racing through his body.

"Pshaw!" he told himself. "I ain't afraid of any Harper there is. They cain't be pizen—that's sure enough!"

"Steve!"

Seth Galbraith beckoned him confidentially to a far corner of the back part of the store. Behind a stack of boxes he laid a pudgy hand upon the boy's shoulder.

"Son," he said softly, "both Harpers hev bin around to-day, an' Amos, he's bin runnin' off at the mouth. They're a couple of bad eggs, and I wouldn't want fer you to pay any 'tenshun, understan'? It warn't old Harper—he never says nothin'. Jest you pay no mind to Amos."

The hand gathered like a clamp on the boy's shoulder.

"Thanks, Mr. Galbraith," Steve said in a thin voice that came from an inexplicably tightened throat. "I ain't stewin' any."

III

WHEN Steve started through the store, Amos Harper turned to the man nearest him with a grin, while he nonchalantly kept up his whittling with a clasp knife upon a pine stick.

"Yes, sir," he said, as if continuing a conversation, "it's a dratted nuisance waitin' fer mail. Reckon, though, ef a carrier an' a woman spends an hour er two alone up in the woods—"

In an instant all the color sank out of Steve Kilrairie's face. He had a clear, photographic flash of vision that recorded the silent, set faces of the men and boys he had known since childhood, the jumbled stock on counters and shelves—but, clearer than all else, the wolflike smile that was twisting on the lips of Amos Harper.

Something utterly uncontrollable surged through all his nerves. Swift as the plunge of a piston his arm shot out, and a browned, compact fist split Amos Harper's tight lips against his discolored teeth. The man reeled halfway across the room from the impact, but saved himself from falling as he sagged against a counter. Somewhere in his throat there was the sound of a snarl.

Steve felt, rather than saw, a greenish glint in the darkened eyes, and caught the strip of light that was the blade of a knife. In the same instant, with an annihilating, totally unexpected summoning of bestial ferocity, Harper lunged, as if catapulted, upon the boy. His knife, held belt high, had its blade upturned for the ripping stroke of the killer.

The hidden power in the Kilrairie blood burst into instantaneous, devastating power. Like a stone missile, Steve's solidified fist drove itself with a nauseous, bone-breaking smash full against the sharp angle of Amos Harper's jaw. Felled, the man struck the floor with a crash that rattled the shelves of the flimsy building. One leg kicking, he lay on his back with glazed eyes turned toward the ceiling.

A paroxysm of strength unleashed itself within Steve Kilrairie. All at once his brain was a sheet of flame. Swooping, his fingers grappled like steel hooks into Amos Harper's clothes. As if the limp form had no

more weight than a bag of straw, Steve hurled it through the air and, with a smashing of glass and sash, through the window that was on the other side of a counter. Amid the trash of a side yard Amos sprawled motionless, face downward.

Then something fled from Steve. Within a moment he was powerless, the prey of an ague that shook him through and through. Looking at no one, he walked out of the store, crossed the dusty street, and went to the little room that was his own in the near-by boarding house.

After an hour he returned to the scene, gripped by the fear that he had killed a man. The strength of the Kilraines! Steve's father had often spoken of it as if it were a curse—had warned him to use it sparingly, never in anger. Murder in Missouri meant hanging; and Susie—merely to think of her froze his heart.

They were loading Amos Harper into a wagon in front of the store—loading him in flat, with one arm trailing lazily. Old Elijah Harper was mounting the seat when he saw his son's antagonist. Carefully, methodically, he wound the reins around the whip staff and came straight up to Kilraine. Steve looked him squarely in the face.

Old Harper's eyes were dry and shiny, like two agate marbles. Perched on the wide, bony crown of his head was a tattered felt hat; the flanges of his narrow jaws were covered with the grayed stubble of a beard. When he spoke, his strong saffron teeth were shown like fangs.

"Boy," he said in a high, whining voice, "I got a crow to pick with you, but I ain't got time now. Mebbe you killed my son Amos. From the way he's laid out, I don't reckon he'll ever be much 'count any more."

Steve found it difficult to meet the black-green of the old man's glistening eyes. He was conscious of some eerie evil that physical strength alone was not sufficiently powerful to fight off. To steady his voice required an effort.

"Mr. Harper," he said, "the only man that's got any license to talk to me 'bout what I done is the sheriff of this here county!"

The older man squinted his eyes until they were narrow, baleful gashes.

"Boy, don't you worry 'bout no sheriff." He spoke without haste. "You got jest one man on earth to worry about, and thet's me—Amos Harper's pappy. Roll

thet over in yore mind, boy, an' it 'll be the sweetest day of yore life when you fergit it!"

Abruptly he turned away.

For a mile or more, Steve watched the wagon bearing its strange pair snail out toward the ramshackle cabin. When it had finally passed from sight, he went into the store.

For a while he stood there silently. No one attempted to discuss the fight with him. The supper hour in Gum Fork came, but he was without appetite. To an invitation from Seth Galbraith he mumbled an excuse.

"Come on over to the house and set on the porch, anyway," the postmaster and storekeeper urged. "Feelin' kind of shook up, ain't you?"

"Kind of."

"Thought mebbe you was." Together they left the store. "Ever carry a gun, Steve?"

"No, sir."

"I got an old weepion over home—old, but she's still purty true up to, say, a hundred yards. Yes, sir, Steve, she's a tol'able pistol—right tol'able."

The whole world of strife and struggle became suddenly repugnant to Steve Kilraine. Why, he asked himself, couldn't people be content to be neighborly? What was the root of this hatred and thirst for blood? Why did men take it as something to be cherished and kept alive?

Had Amos Harper openly and honestly won the love of Susie McKinley, Steve imagined that he would have borne no grudge. Love wasn't a thing to be fought over, a thing to call for nasty insinuations. His own bewildering outburst of resentment had sprung from a dangerous curse in his blood, which was, in reality, alien to his nature. Mentally, he was against a solid wall.

"Mr. Galbraith," he said, "if you was to give me a gun, I wouldn't know what to do with it."

Galbraith cleared his throat and paused a moment before answering.

"If you don't know, I reckon I better advise you. You take thet gun, and the first time old man Harper opens his head to you, you blow it off. They ain't no jury in this county goin' to make you swing for it, I reckon. Leastwise, we'll try to see thet you don't."

"But I cain't see—"

"Cain't see!" Galbraith snorted. "Don't you realize you prob'ly done killed

Amos Harper? You hit him like a pile driver, and I reckon you broke his neck or his skull—one or t'other. He ain't never come to yit. No man stays senseless more'n an hour lessen he's dern near dead. Old Harper, he wouldn't let me telephone fer no doctor. Boy, yo're dealin' with a couple of mad dogs. Both them Harpers is half crazy. You got to do yore shootin' sudden like an' unexpected."

They were outside Seth Galbraith's gate. Steve halted.

"Reckon I won't go in with you, after all, Mr. Galbraith. Think I'll go home and git to bed. If I ain't arrested in the mornin', I'll be here to take the mail out, same as always."

Galbraith touched the boy's arm with a rough gesture of friendship. He was just a puffy old man with stern faith in powder and lead in a crisis.

"You ain't goin' to be arrested, I reckon, lessen Amos Harper dies, and then I'll go yore bond. You wait here, if you don't want to come in, an' I'll bring thet weepin' out to you."

Steve shook his head and smiled slowly, boyishly. In the dusk he looked scarcely more than seventeen.

"Thank you just the same, Mr. Galbraith, but I reckon I'll make out somehow without it."

The postmaster cocked his head a bit to one side.

"Steve, you natcherly got to do somethin'. What's it goin' to be?"

From somewhere in the bushes came the soft, musical notes of a thrush. Twilight was beginning to blur the green of the hills that rose around Gum Fork.

Steve Kilraine hung his head, and dug at the grass with one of his stoutly shod feet. He became aware of a soft, sweet scent in the air, as a vagrant breeze stirred a bush by the gatepost. It was a lilac bush. Reaching up, he broke off a short spray and fumbled with it in his fingers. When he lifted his face, it was white with faint pinched lines coming down from the corners of his nostrils.

"What you goin' to do?" Galbraith asked remorselessly. "Ain't scared, air you?"

Steve nodded his head slightly, and managed to keep his eyes level.

"You bet yore life I'm scared, Mr. Galbraith. I don't know what I'm goin' to do, neither; but I don't want to do anything

I'll be sorry fer all my life. I'm sorry, sir, but I'm jest built thet way."

IV

For a week there was no news of the Harpers. Once a day Steve drove past their place, but beyond a faint curl of smoke—which probably came from a kitchen fire—there was no sign that life existed inside. Bleak, stark, in the center of a clearing grown around with wild brush, the slatternly house seemed to sulk, to throw out a kind of disordered hatred against all who passed it by.

From the time when Steve's stage came in sight of the structure until he had put it safely behind him, the boy was always stirred with an uneasiness that centered in his breast, around his heart. From the shelter of any one of fifty bushes old Harper could shoot him off his seat, just as easy as dropping a squirrel off a branch—could and probably would, sooner or later.

No physician had been called to attend to Amos Harper. Doc Hutchinson, who rode twenty miles in any direction from his home at Gum Fork, had not been summoned. It was certain, also, that no medical man from a greater distance had called at the place.

Equally certain it was that the injured man had not recovered. In a country where news of any kind spreads rapidly by word of mouth, Steve could not help learning that old Harper had not been seen in his fields since the fight. A neighbor, living a mile from the Harpers, reported that, passing the house on his way back from a coon hunt, long after midnight, he had observed a light burning steadily in one of the rooms.

"Pears like the old man is settin' up day an' night with Amos," the hunter had said. "If a man had a sick horse, I'd go over and help him with it, er I'd send my old woman, fer decency's sake, if it was a sick human bein'; but I ain't goin' monkeyin' around where no Harpers is—no, sir!"

All of this, and more, came to Steve's ears. Day by day his mood grew gloomier. Susie was as far removed from him as if he were already dead. He had scarcely seen her. In fact, he had avoided her when he was in town.

He felt that old Harper was simply waiting for Amos to die. Then—a spurt of flame from behind a bush, and the end of everything!

It was best to crush out all tenderness of emotion. Susie McKinley belonged to another world—the world that was to keep on living.

The thought of death lodged in Steve's mind. Sometimes, as he careened along behind the mules on a level stretch of road, it was temporarily out of his head. Not exactly that, either. Behind the occasional flare-ups of the old joy of living lurked the shadowy dread of a grim fate—the unavoidable.

His sleep, as time wore on, became irregular and disturbed. Far into the nights he stayed awake, listening to the shrilling of the frogs and the clanking of cow bells in distant pastures. Heaven, he conceived, was a bright and glorious place of eternal rapture. Right well Steve knew that such bliss was not for him—that he was not righteous enough to be admitted. The only kind of hell he could imagine was the one he had heard the camp meeting preachers roaring about—a sort of gigantic furnace with a bed of red coals and great leaping flames, sulphurous and blue. It did not seem altogether fair that he should be sent to such a place. Then he remembered certain familiar words.

"A murderer," they said, "cannot enter the kingdom of heaven."

Several times he thought of running away; but the idea of flight was so foreign to all that was in him that the plan never became important.

No word came from the Harper house to relieve his suspense. Once, unable to sleep, he got out of bed and tramped clear out to the place. It was nearly dawn. From the road he could see the vigil light burning like a yellow and evil eye. A temptation to pick up a stone and hurl it through the window assailed him. Anger, long stilled, rose up in a hot flood. It required all his will power to turn about and go back to town. In bed again, he slept soundly through the short hours that remained before his usual rising time.

He grew pallid. A pasty color started as a patch below either ear, and spread over his whole face.

"My God, Mr. Galbraith!" he cried. "I can't carry that—that thing! You can't expect me to!"

He had come for the morning load of mail and parcel post packages. On the table, amid the litter of outgoing boxes and cartons, there lay, sewed in flimsy sacking,

the shape of a flat gravestone. It was rounded at the top, no more than two inches in thickness—a marker and a headstone of the cheapest kind, the commonest in country districts.

"I'm powerful sorry, Steve!"

The boy picked up the stamped tag that bore the address. His breath came with a slight whistle between his teeth. He read:

Elijah J. Harper, Gum Fork, Mo., R. R. No. 7.

"Amos Harper's done dead!" he breathed.

"Don't think so," Seth Galbraith said. "Old Harper's expectin' him to die mighty soon—er somethin' else!"

"Er what else?"

"He might be tryin' to break down yore nerve. Looks like he must have drove over to Rawlings, on the railroad, to send off fer this—this thing. He knowed you was bound to carry it. Steve, them Harper people is cunnin' like foxes. You might as well stidy yoreself."

Galbraith stepped over to the table and turned the stone, which had been face downward.

"Buck up yore sand, boy, an' read what it says!"

Steve brought his eyes to bear upon the stone, and read, through the thin woof of the sacking, the words that were graven into the smooth white surface:

AMOS HARPER
Murdered by Steve Kilraine
Born Dec. 12, 1887
Died _____

"If you don't want to drive stage to-day, Steve, we kin put on a substitute."

Steve ran his fingers over the smooth surface of the stone, and followed along the grooved tracings that formed the lettering.

"Tryin' to git my goat," he murmured, quoting a bit of slang that had come into the hills. He turned to Galbraith. "He knowed for sure I'd have to carry this. It's jest a scheme—thet's all!"

Galbraith eyed the boy seriously.

"I wish you'd make up yore mind to carry thet pistol, son," he urged. "You got a perfect license to tote a gun, bein' a mail carrier."

Again there came to Steve Kilraine that burning sense of anger that he had experienced upon seeing the night light in the Harper window. With it was a sense of stimulation—something that seemed to

melt out the chill dread that had clung to all his waking hours.

The thing was no **more** than a piece of stone, smoothed and lettered with a steel tool—inanimate, harmless, without significance. Amos Harper wasn't dead, else there would have been no blank space after the word "died." It was queer, though, that old Harper had sent for it.

"Ain't got a bit of right in the world to name me as murderin' his son," Steve said under his breath. "Leastwise, not till Amos dies."

A gust of impatience tore through the boy. As easily as if the stone had been made of light pine, he picked it up, tramped through the store, and slid it under the back seat of the stage. When he came back for the rest of his load, Seth Galbraith's face had lost something of its constrained anxiety.

"Guess I won't worry none 'bout you, Steve, as long as you keep your dander up," he said in a relieved voice. "It's been my experience that a man don't git inter a great deal of trouble as long as he keeps a stiff upper lip."

V

OLD Harper was waiting. A quarter of a mile away Steve could see him, a gaunt figure leaning on a broken-hinged gate. It was the first time, since the encounter, that he had seen the man.

Beside the gate Steve drew up his team to a halt, and got out the stone from under the back seat. Harper watched him with emotionless, agate eyes.

Neither spoke. It was impossible to place the thing either in or upon the weather-beaten mail box. A carrier is not required to get out of his vehicle. Steve leaned over, dropped the slab at old Harper's feet, and gazed for a moment with unwavering eyes straight at the father of Amos. Unblinkingly, Harper returned the mail carrier's stare. Steve picked up the lines and drove on.

At the next turn of the road he turned and looked back. Harper had the stone under his arm and was moving with it toward the house.

On Friday, which was three days later, it rained. Throughout the night before the skies were open, pouring down sheeted torrents that reeked through hills and valleys and woodlands, guttering, foaming through

gullies, swelling creeks, draws, and branches to swirling, churning races of angry waters.

Dawn came, murky, dank, and dismal. Shivering, red-eyed from lack of sleep, Steve got out of bed. This day, he knew, was the end.

It was the end because he knew that he could go on no longer. In the night it had come to him—the realization of the turning point, the approach of some complete, decisive action. With the first lowering of clouds the evening before there had settled upon him a great unrest, as of heavy water piling up behind a dam.

Steve Kilrairie—all of the Kilrairies before him—possessed, along with their heritage of strength in bone and flesh, the obscure intuition, the age-old instinct of the primal Celts from whom their race had sprung. This thing lay above and beyond any function of the mind—a vague and confused prompting from some ancient strain that had been almost, but not quite, bred out since the passing of tribal life.

In the survival of this remnant out of the past there was a certainty of feeling that transcended any operation of Steve Kilrairie's intellect. He knew that the day had come for settlement. There was infinite relief in the knowledge.

The rain, which had been as a continuous volley upon his roof all through the night, continued with drenching force. The normal appetite of the boy had vanished. For several hours he rummaged in the small trunk he had brought into town from his farm home, sorting out old pictures of his blood kin who had long passed away, and spreading them on his bed in a gallery.

He was the last of the family—the last, at least, in that part of the country. Good men, good women! Their lot in life had been a station above poverty. Nevertheless, not one of them had been without the trait of independence. Steve could not be ashamed of them.

When it was time to leave, he slipped into an oilskin coat, hitched up, and brought his team and stage to the usual hitching place in front of the store. The mail, he knew, would be laid out and waiting for him on the long table behind the partition. So it had been every alternate day for three years—a long time!

Passing, he caressed the muzzle of one of the mules.

Seth Galbraith came around from behind the mail wicket to meet him.

"Steve!"

Galbraith's tone was quiet, speculative. A disinclination to talk was upon the boy. He merely looked at the postmaster with clouded eyes.

"I kin git a man to stay in the store to-day," Galbraith said. "As a matter of fact, I stick too close inside, anyhow. I ought to git out more. If you don't mind, I'd like to take the stage through myself. There's a piece of land down the road I been layin' off to look at. I been dickerin' about it. If you don't mind, you could lay off to-day."

A slight, barely distinguishable smile curved Steve's lips. Galbraith had not deceived him.

"I'll take it through myself, if you don't mind, sir," he answered. "I got a special reason."

"So have I, son. I reckon it's best to tell you straight out. I l'arnt somethin' about old Harper. He come inter town yesterday and drew out what money he had in the bank—somethin' over three hundred dollars. Besides that, he's sold off what stock he had on the place. Looks like he's fixin' to clear out."

Steve was already moving toward the back part of the store—toward the mail.

"Wait!" Galbraith touched his arm with a detaining hand. "I said he might be fixin' fer a git-away. Thet ain't all. Somethin' else came through the mail fer him this mornin'—somethin' you'll hev to carry yoreself, if you make the trip. There ain't no way I can turn it back. It weighs jest under a hundred pounds, and thet puts it inside the parcel post limit." A queer note crept into Seth Galbraith's voice. "Steve, it's another one of them things!"

Steve realized that he was conscious of no surprise.

"Thet's all right, Mr. Galbraith. I don't mind a bit. It's my job, carryin' the mail—fetchin' things to folks. I can't balk at tombstones."

"You plumb insist on drivin' through to-day?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right! Only I had a fancy you oughtn't—to-day. You see, this particular stone—there ain't no Harper's name writ on it." He hesitated. "It's—it's made out in yore name, an' it don't seem right to make a man carry his own gravestone. It's like deliverin' himself up inter the hands of his enemies. I thought—"

A gulp came into the boy's throat.

"I'm shore obliged, Mr. Galbraith. I don't mind totin' it. It don't matter—not one bit. It's all in the day's work."

Thereafter, as the mail was swiftly transferred to the stage, there was no conversation between the two. It was Steve who carried the gravestone. He put it under the front seat, after giving a quick glance at the inscription:

HERE LIES STEVE KILRAINE
MURDERER

He wondered what the workman who had done the lettering had thought. With him, too, it was all in the day's work. Odd, the jobs men have to do!

Steve climbed to the seat, and was buckling the side curtains, to keep out the wet. Seth Galbraith stood beside him, with the rain beating down on his head, making tiny rivulets through his hair and down his face. He was tugging at his hip pocket under his coat.

"I shore wish you'd take this along with you, Steve!" He pushed up a heavily nicked revolver—a relic and a trophy of his own youth. "She might come in handy on a day like this."

Steve had not thought of arming himself, but now it seemed quite a reasonable and proper thing. The whole day, his entire future, had a dreamlike cast. The weapon, as he took it, felt entirely natural in his hand.

"Thanks," he said.

Galbraith kept shaking his hand. The rain beat so constantly upon the older man's face that his eyes appeared to be swimming in tears.

Going up the hill, the stone slid sidewise on the bottom of the wagon and pressed against Steve's foot, as if to remind him of its presence. The mules pulled slowly. Straining, dropping into one rut after another, rising with a tilt on stones washed clear of surrounding earth, the vehicle rocked upward toward the summit. With every uneven jolt the slab kept slipping. Finally it thudded against a paper carton of eggs.

Steve came to the conclusion that the thing was trying to harass him, that it was possessed of a diabolical spitefulness. Stooping, he picked it up and put it on the seat beside him. His own name stared up into his face. At a sudden bump, it shifted again, and one sharp corner dug into his

thigh painfully. An insistent spot of pain clung to his leg.

"Come here!" He lifted the stone and placed it across his knees. "Ride there, and keep still! I know yo're with me!"

It occurred to him that he might never again see Susie McKinley. He was in front of her house. Pulling on one rein, he turned the mules in at the gate and drove into the yard, up to the front door.

The girl came out on the porch. She walked out heedlessly into the downpour and stood at the hub.

"I been watchin' you go past day by day, Steve," she said. "I was watchin' at you talk fer a minute," he said. "I jest wanted to freshen up the picture thet's been in my mind."

A sensation of her loveliness tore at his breast. It was a torture he had tried to spare himself until this, the last day.

"I jest wanted to look at you an' hear you talk fer a minute," he said. "I jest wanted to freshen up the picture thet's been in my mind."

"Steve!" For the first time she saw what he was holding in his lap. She also saw, with startled eyes, that he still held in his hand the revolver that Seth Galbraith had given him. "Oh, Steve!"

The shock of her surprise was matched in his own. He had not known until then that he was carrying the weapon. He looked at it dumbly.

"It's the Harpers!" she cried in an agony of feeling. "Yo're a goin' down the road to fight it out with 'em!"

With one foot on the hub, she raised herself to the level of the seat, to the level of Steve Kilraine's eyes. Her fingers closed on the revolver, and he let her have it.

"God won't let 'em kill you," she said with serious conviction. "Yo're a comin' back, and yo're a comin' back 'thout stainin' yoreself with killin'! An' thet thing you got on yore lap—"

"Don't look at it," he said. "Look here!"

She was close to his breast for a moment, with his arms around her. Her lips, cool and sweet, pressed against his. Gently he let her down to the ground. Lest she should see his face, he picked up the lines and started the mules.

VI

THE Harper house, dank and gloomy, loomed ahead through the pouring waters. Even from a distance Steve could see that the blinds were drawn. As he came closer,

he saw that the windows were down, that the front door was closed. Above the tumbled brick chimney a fog of faint blue smoke hung low.

The temptation to drop the gravestone at the gate and go on—to defer the final settlement—assailed him; but he put the idea out of his head. Although the stage was barely creeping through the heavy mud, he jammed on the brake and drew up with a firm pressure on the lines.

One leg slid out over the seat, and he descended with his back to the house. At any instant, Steve realized, Harper could put a bullet through him.

Half expecting the crack of a rifle, he turned and faced the house. The gravestone was under his arm. If he lived, he meant to deliver it inside—to have done forever with threats and doubts. With every subtle instinct that brooded in the very pith of his being he knew that once he passed through the doorway ahead, one or the other—Steve Kilraine or old Harper—must die.

The only sound was the beating of the rain. As he neared the house it took on a roar—the heavy drumming on the shingled roof. Water, gushing down the worn pathway, got into his shoes and drove through his clothes until it touched his bare skin with a cold sting.

A loose board on the insecure porch wobbled under his foot. From within the house, for the first time, he caught the sound of voices—angry, disputatious, high-pitched. Amos Harper was up and out of bed, and was talking in a strident voice that bespoke complete recovery. Steve recognized the tones, and heard old Harper's queer whine, although the words uttered were indistinguishable.

It would be one man against two, Steve realized. That was the way things had stacked up. Inside of a minute he would know how things were going to turn out. Whatever fate waited beyond the weather-blistered door, he knew there would be no peace for him, on earth or elsewhere, until he had faced the menace—until the feud was settled.

The gravestone was under his right arm. Suddenly there came to him the comfort that he was a government man—that behind him was a vast, sustaining moral power. He lifted his left fist to knock on the door.

The roar of revolver fire, penned in by

close walls and low ceiling, belched, in the same instant, with reverberating fury. With the sound, he was freed from the last vagrant tremor of the nerves. A half smile came to his lips. He was merely a Kilraine—going into it!

Without hesitation he lifted his foot and kicked the door in, ripping off the catch of the lock with the sturdy force of the impact. The door slapped back on its protesting hinges and revealed a dim and bleak interior, fogged with white, acrid smoke.

Amos Harper, fully dressed, stood before him, with the green sallowness of his face contorted, twisted like a vile mask. In one hand was the weapon, trailing smoke from the end of the barrel; in the murderer's other hand was clutched a thick sheaf of currency.

Sinking, collapsing against a wall, old Harper kept catching at his breast, where a dark spot was spreading on his shirt. As he slipped down to the floor, his head took on a curious nodding motion.

"Amos, he shot me—his pappy!" he wheezed in a complaining voice. "He done stole my money, arter I nussed him like a baby!"

Amos Harper watched his father until the old man was prone, motionless, upon the floor. Crouching, he whirled upon Steve, his weapon weaving in his hand. His eyes were upon the open door.

"Git outen my way, Kilraine!" he snarled. "Git out afore I let you hev it!"

"You'll hev to shoot!" Steve cried, as he closed in.

The shot was first a bellow of sound, then a biting sting in the shoulder. He felt himself grappling with Amos Harper. Something heavy kept getting between them. Amos Harper was trying to get away—to pull loose and flee.

One of Steve's arms was securely around his enemy's neck, and only inches divided their faces. The green of Amos Harper's

eyes deepened. The hand that held his revolver began to twist—to pull back. Between them was the smashing blast of five shots pouring like a hot stream in the direction of Steve Kilraine's vitals.

Harper dropped his empty weapon and pulled back.

"You—you got yore belly full of lead, and yo're laughin'!" he cried in a wild spasm of disbelief, his eyes as wide as those of a man who sees a ghost.

The burden that Steve had unconsciously been clutching fell to the floor with a smash. Upon the gravestone inscribed with the name of Steve Kilraine were splotted five smoke-burned indentations where the five bullets from Amos Harper's revolver had encountered an impenetrable shield.

Then, there, Steve knew that he was alive—gloriously alive, even with the blood sopping from the wound in his shoulder. The strength of the Kilraines! It would last long enough. Once more it flooded him. There was enough of it left to leap upon the beast of a man before him; to beat him down, to hammer and hammer at his face and neck until he was no more than a limp mass—something that whimpered and sobbed.

Old Harper was still—so still that Kilraine knew he would never move again. By a stupendous effort, Steve got Amos Harper up and across his shoulders like a sack of flour. Before his last reserve of strength ebbed away, the boy managed to stagger down the path to the road with his burden, and to dump it into the stage like a helpless and harmless thing.

Slowly Steve climbed to his seat. There was blackness before his eyes. Somehow he managed to turn the mules toward town. In the back part of his consciousness was the certainty that Amos Harper was utterly conquered.

"Giddap, mules!" he muttered. "Let's go on!"

DANGER

BEHIND us roar the cataracts of time,
Whirling and sucking into the abyss
Whelmed empires of the past; and faiths sublime,
Betrayed to darkness by oblivion's kiss,
Go down forever in its boiling surge.
Oh, upward let us still our footsteps urge
Lest we grow dizzy on the precipice!

Harry Kemp

The Man Hunt

A ROMANCE OF NEW YORK AND THE CHESAPEAKE

By Hulbert Footner

Author of "Thieves' Wit," "Country Love," etc.

PEN BROOME lives with her father in a dilapidated house, which was once a mansion, on a lonely point of land on the western shore of Chesapeake Bay. Donald Counsell, a young New York broker, making a solitary canoe trip, camps on the beach and meets the Broomes. That evening a Baltimore newspaper informs them that Counsell is wanted by the police for the murder of his partner, Collis Dongan. Pendleton Broome, Pen's father, sets off in his motor boat for Absolom's Island, the nearest village, to give information of the young man's whereabouts; but Pen, who does not believe him guilty, goes down to the beach and warns him. Counsell, stunned by the news, affirms his innocence; but the circumstantial evidence against him is so strong that Pen, to give him time to decide upon some plan of defense, shows him a hiding place in the woods where he will be safe for a while.

Pendleton Broome's message to the authorities brings upon the scene a small army of reporters and detectives. Failing to discover the missing man, they try to extract information from Pen, and a police officer from New York threatens her with arrest when she refuses to answer his questions.

VI

THE man left the room. Pen believed this to be a bluff, and smiled scornfully. Her father was impressed, however. He sank down in his chair, and put out an imploring hand toward his daughter. He was incapable of speaking.

"Do you want anything else of me?" Pen coolly asked her questioner.

Seeing that his threat had failed of effect, the detective judged it prudent not to prolong this scene.

"That is all for the present," he said loftily. "You will please not leave the house."

"Thank you," replied Pen; "but until I am arrested I shall do just what I am accustomed to do."

She left the room with her head up, and went on up the stairs; but she was not at all pleased with herself. That inner voice said remorselessly:

"You have only angered him without doing Don any good."

To be sure, she had seen sympathy in the eyes of some of the reporters, but they could not say anything that might endanger their working agreement with the

detectives. At the thought of danger to herself, Pen smiled. She was in the frame of mind that welcomes persecution; but her heart was full of terror for Don. She had not foreseen that the place would be overrun like this. He was so near! And the detective's order to remain in the house suggested that they suspected he might still be on the place.

On her knees at her front window, she watched the men leave the house in a body. Some shrubbery cut off her view of the gate, and she could not tell which way they turned after passing through it. Fortunately, only an hour or two of daylight remained.

When she was sure that the house was emptied of strangers, she went downstairs to see about the belated supper. She was mad with anxiety to know what was happening outside, but people must eat, whatever might come. Everything in the kitchen was at sixes and sevens, of course, and Aunt Maria nowhere to be seen.

The old negress presently waddled in, panting. She was both terrified and delighted by the gale of excitement that had suddenly blown upon the settled peace of Broome's Point.

In order to divert her mistress's wrath, she made haste to give Pen the latest news from outside. It appeared that the detectives and the reporters had jointly hired the empty tenant cottage outside the gate, and were busy establishing themselves there. They had sent over to the island for supplies, and for all the cots and bedding available. They had hired a white woman from up the Neck to cook for them.

"Huh!" said Aunt Maria scornfully. "All Mis' Hat Dawkins evah cook is fat back and cawn pone!"

Pen breathed more freely.

Pen and her father supped alone together. The events of half a lifetime seemed to have occurred since the last time they had sat down without guests. That was at breakfast the day before.

By now every vestige of Pendleton's self-important air was gone. The situation had become too big for him. He was too much overcome even to blame Pen for anything that had happened. As always when things became difficult, he depended on his daughter's superior strength. He had to blame something, so he railed ceaselessly against the evil chance that had brought Counsell to their door.

Pen, busy with her own thoughts, let him run on. Her brain was clicking like a well oiled piece of machinery. Like a brave fighter, she had to count up all the chances against her.

How was she going to get out of the house that night, and how reach Don, when their enemies were camped squarely beside her path? How could she guide him to a safer hiding place, and yet leave the way open to carry him what he needed from time to time? How could she get him away from that dangerous neighborhood altogether?

Perhaps, after all, Broome's Point was the safest place in the world for him; but what prodigies of courage, of astuteness, of resourcefulness would be demanded from her! Not for an instant would she be able to relax. Nerved as she was, it was a prospect to make her tremble.

Pen enjoyed one great advantage in knowing every foot of ground around the place. The daily hunt for her vagrant turkeys had taught her that, as well as the search for their nests every spring. She knew she could find her way on the darkest night, but she was a good deal troubled by the natives wandering around the place. A

party of them had built a fire over in the northeast corner of the grounds, as if they intended to bivouac there.

The darker the night, the better for her. She watched the sky anxiously. It was quite heavily overcast, but with the moon at the full there would be a good deal of diffused light, just the same.

Another danger was that her dog, Dougall, might betray her. She got around that by instructing Theodo' to shut him up in the barn. She had a convenient reason for doing so in that Doug had not been at all hospitable to the strangers during the day.

"He might hurt somebody," Pen said.

The hours after supper were trying ones for Pen. Her plans were complete, but she needed darkness and quiet to put them into motion. Somebody had brought the mail over from Absolom's Island, and Pendleton was absorbed in the latest accounts of the Counsell case. There was nothing about Broome's Point, as yet, save the bare announcement that Counsell had turned up there in a canoe.

Pen was obliged to read the paper, too, though it nauseated her. This day's story contained nothing of special significance. There was an interview with Ernest Riever, the millionaire who had put up the reward for Counsell's capture. Pen determined to ask Don about him.

Toward dark one of the detectives, without so much as "by your leave," came and took up his station in a chair on the front porch. Pen, hearing him slapping at the mosquitoes out there, smiled dryly to herself. She went out into the dark kitchen, and found, as she expected, that there was another man on the kitchen porch. This relieved her mind. Much better to know where the watchers were than to have them concealed about the grounds! Pen had her own way of getting out of the house.

She could not get her father started to bed until she first made believe to go herself. She lay down on the outside of her bed, fully clothed. When, after an age-long wait, she heard the sound of his snores from across the hall, she rose again and flitted noiselessly downstairs.

For the past hours she had heard no sound from outside. She was accustomed to moving around the house in the dark, and she already had everything that she wanted to carry with her placed ready to her hand. Wrapping each article separately in newspaper, she put them all in a jute bag.

Then, satisfying herself that the watchers were still on the front and the back porch, she made her way down cellar. There was a possibility that there might be other men stationed out in the grounds, but she had to chance that.

On the north side of the house, under the kitchen, the cellar communicated with the outside by half a dozen steps and inclined doors in the old style. The milk was brought in this way, and the doors were always open. A clump of bushes outside accounted for the fact that the opening had not yet been discovered. This was the blind side of the house.

For a moment Pen lingered behind the bushes, listening. Then she came out. All along the northern side of the grounds ran a wind-break of arbor vitæ. There was a gap in it, torn by the winter gales. Pen made for that. She neither ran nor crouched. She wanted to escape observation, if possible; but if she were seen, she wished to know of it. The fatal thing would be to lead some one unwittingly to Don's hiding place.

She passed through the gap and hid herself on the other side, to make sure she was not followed. Nobody came through.

She then had to make a long detour around the house grounds, across the old paddock and the stable yard in the rear, across the road which led up the Neck, and thence through a small triangular field into the woods. Within shadow of the woods she waited again, to make sure she was not followed across the field. Nothing stirred behind her. She could see pretty well.

There was no path through this part of the woods, and it was a matter of infinite difficulty to make her way through the underbrush and the thorny creepers without betraying herself. She forced patience on herself, and proceeded foot by foot. The distance was not far, and she laid a true course. She came out on her own path in the woods. Her heart began to beat in her throat. A hundred paces farther lay the little temple.

Donald heard her coming and ducked out from under his mosquito curtain. His arms went out to her involuntarily. Pen, fearful of some outburst, made a warning sound:

"Sh-h!"

That unthinking gesture of his melted her completely. How natural to have flung herself into his arms! All her carefully

built-up strength seemed to run away like water; but she fought desperately against her weakness. Not for an instant could she afford to relax. She must think and be strong for both of them.

She turned aside from his begging arms.

"I was delayed," she whispered faintly. "Much has happened."

"What does it matter?" he said warmly. "You're here! This is the longest day I've ever lived through. You told me you wouldn't be here till night, but I couldn't help expecting you. Every time a leaf stirred, I thought it was you!"

He sought to draw her to him.

"You mustn't!" whispered Pen sharply. "We're surrounded by danger. We must plan. This place is no longer safe. You must listen to me—listen carefully."

His arms dropped to his sides. Pen hurriedly began to tell her story, but he interrupted her.

"Come inside. The mosquitoes are too bad."

She hung back a little. Could she withstand him in the close intimacy of his little tent? She must! Steeling her breast, she followed him in.

They sat side by side on the ground, nursing their knees and looking out through the mosquito curtain at the little temple outlined against the pale sky. Their shoulders pressed warmly together. That contact deprived Pen of the power of thinking, and she moved away a little. That hurt him, as she knew by the hang of his head; but she went doggedly ahead with her story.

When she came to the end, Don said bitterly:

"Well, I've had time to-day to think things over. There's only one course open to me. I must give myself up."

Pen had expected this.

"Wait!" she said urgently. "We must talk things over. You must read the papers I brought you before you make up your mind. You don't know yet what you're up against. I don't understand what makes the newspapers so bitter. Everybody seems to be roused to a sort of craze to hunt you down. What sort of a trial would you get? Why, they were ready to arrest me because I took your part!"

Don was wildly indignant.

"You have to go through such things while I sit here in safety!" he cried.

"That was nothing," said Pen. "He didn't really mean it."

"I can't stand it!" cried Don. "You don't know what I'm going through, sitting here idle and thinking about these things. I shall go out of my mind!"

"I do know what you're going through," murmured Pen.

"Suppose I did get away," he went on. "Would my life be worth saving with this accusation hanging over me? What sort of a life could I lead?"

"But the truth must come to light," insisted Pen. "We will bring it to light!"

"How can I fight for myself, tied hand and foot like this?"

"You could use me," she murmured.

"That's just it!" he said bitterly. "I couldn't!"

"You haven't much of an opinion of women, have you?"

"You don't understand me. I don't doubt that you're a whole lot cleverer than I; but I have my pride. What would you think of a man who—"

He ended with a shrug.

"We just argue round and round in a circle," said Pen dejectedly.

"So it seems."

"It's a waste of time," she said more firmly. "Let us talk things over, and find out where we're at. Your first thought was that it was a case of suicide."

"I've changed my mind," he said. "Dongan hadn't the nerve. He was the sort of man to cling to life. Besides, the loss of seventy-five thousand dollars wasn't a knock-out blow to him. He could have raised the money."

"Then it was murder," said Pen. "That agrees with the doctor's evidence. Who do you think killed him?"

"I swear I don't know," said Don helplessly. "I've been beating my brains all day without being able to hit out an idea. His life was as open as daylight."

"You knew him well?"

"About as well as one man can know another. We came of the same lot, you see—old New York families that had been acquainted for three or four generations. We were too close for my comfort, sometimes. He was one of these men with no reticence. His confidences were embarrassing. He was alone in the world, and he had a horror of his own company. Very often I was hard put to it to get away about my own concerns."

"But you were much attached to him?"

"Frankly, no," said Don. "He was the

sort of man you just take as a matter of course—perfectly well-meaning, but a bit of a bore. No salt in him. I never would have gone in with him if I'd realized."

"The newspaper said that he was your benefactor."

"Not exactly," said Don dryly. "When I came out of college, I was at a loose end. I'm the last of my lot, you know. Not a near relation in the world. It's true that Dongan offered me a partnership, but it was not altogether philanthropy. I had twenty-five thousand to put in. He had his seat on the Stock Exchange, and he needed the capital."

"You said he swindled you."

"It was his first crooked deal, I'm sure. Even now I can't understand it. He must have been possessed!"

"How did it come out?"

"On Friday night we had dinner together. Lord, it seems like a year ago, instead of five days! And now the earth is over him!"

"You mustn't think of that," said Pen quickly.

"You're right! He had something on his mind—said he wanted to talk to me; so I went up to his rooms afterward. There he blurted out that he was long on Union Central. The stock had broken thirteen points that day. He was seventy-five thousand in the hole. Hadn't a sou, he said. Evidently he'd been bucking the market for some time. Well, that was bad enough, but he actually had the cheek to suggest that I should take the debt on my shoulders. I was young, he said; I could live it down, whereas it would ruin him. In the end it came out that he had already entered the transactions in my name in our private ledger, knowing that I never looked in the book. That made me see red. Such treachery! I blew up. I withdrew from the firm on the spot. I told him he could have my twenty-five thousand until he was on his feet, and he could borrow the rest from his wealthy friends."

"What did you do next?" asked Pen.

"I was so blazing mad I scarcely knew what I was doing. My one idea was to get shut of the whole boiling. Rotten game, the street! I was fed up with it, anyhow. This only capped the climax. I longed for something clean, like paddling a canoe in open water. My canoe was up at a boat-house on Spuyten Duyvil Creek. I flung a few things into a valise, went right up

there, and got it. I paddled right through the rest of the night—down to Perth Amboy and up the Raritan River. By morning I had cooled off. You see, I had no reason to worry about the firm. Dongan had plenty of wealthy friends. If he'd lived, he could have raised the money."

"How did your revolver get away from you?"

"I don't know. While I was packing, I noticed it wasn't there, but I was too much excited to think about it."

"Had Mr. Dongan any enemies?"

"No. How should he have—a man like that? He never did a positive act in his life, either good or bad."

"A love affair, maybe?"

Don shook his head with a smile.

"Not Dongan's line at all. He had no luck with the sex."

"Who were his friends?"

"He had no really intimate friends, but plenty of associates, of course. There was Ernest Riever."

"I was going to ask you about him."

"You know him?"

"Only as a name."

"Son of Scott Riever, the steel magnate. Scott Riever's one of the richest men in the country. Ernest is rich in his own right, too. He just fluffs around. Has a big place up in Westchester County, where he raises peaches and so forth. It's his hobby."

"What sort of man is he?"

"A queer Dick!" said Don, deliberating. "A queer Dick! Not at all easy to describe offhand."

"He has offered five thousand dollars reward for your capture," said Pen.

Don was electrified.

"What?" he cried. "The devil you say! Riever has come out against me! By the Lord, that's funny!"

"Does that make things clear to you?" Pen asked eagerly.

"Wait a minute! Let me think! It's damned funny! Riever—my God!"

"Tell me," pleaded Pen. "Begin at the beginning. Do you know Riever well?"

"Sure! It was I who introduced him to Dongan. He's the same age as myself, and we were classmates in college. We passed as pals, but it was a queer sort of friendship. I never could make him out. I went in for athletics, and I couldn't keep my end up with his gilded set; but he used to come around me all the time. He didn't seem

to like me, either. I'd catch him looking at me in no friendly way. He'd let out sneering remarks."

"Is he a little man, ill-favored?" asked Pen.

"Why, yes. How did you know?"

Pen smiled to herself.

"Nothing. Go on. You were popular in college?"

"So they said," Don replied offhand. "College popularity doesn't saw much wood in later life."

"But you were prominent?"

"Oh, yes—captain of the crew in my senior year."

"I see. Go on about Riever."

"Well, after we got out of college, there was a sort of mix-up—a nasty mess. Riever had married upon graduation. She was Nell Proctor, daughter of the coal trust man. I don't believe he cared anything about her, nor she about him. It was just the union of two powerful families that both sides were trying to bring about. Meanwhile I'd gone into the brokerage business. Riever would always be asking me up to his place, and I went, of course. I didn't like him any better than before, but I had to cultivate my graft. I don't suppose Riever's stock operations meant much in his life, but he was far and away the biggest customer Dongan & Counsell had. We got business merely through being associated with him."

"I didn't mention, did I, that Riever had a rotten streak in him, particularly where women were concerned? As time went on, I noticed the fair Nell growing ever paler and more tight-lipped, and I guessed that an explosion was coming. Then Riever stopped asking me up there any more. I wondered. He still came to the office and gave us his orders. There was a lot of talk around town, and finally a fellow told me they were saying that Nell Riever had done me the honor—well, you know!"

Pen's breast grew tight.

"I laughed at the story. Why, we had scarcely ever exchanged a word in private. She wasn't my sort at all. Riever's attitude toward me hadn't changed in the least; but soon there was a complete bust-up of his establishment. Nell sued him for divorce. She had cause enough, God knows. His affairs were notorious. He set up a counter suit, and produced a letter in court that Nell had written to some unnamed man. Ernest had intercepted it."

Well, this letter was published, and I knew by internal evidence that it was—well, you know—it had been written to me. A man hates to tell these things about himself. Poor girl! Just a foolish impulse, no doubt, which she regretted as soon as she had given away to it. Anyhow, the letter was thrown out, and she got her divorce with thumping alimony."

"I wish I hadn't had to hear about this woman," poor Pen was thinking to herself. "I shall remember her!"

"My name had not been mentioned openly," Don went on, "and Riever still came around the office. He still pretended to treat me as an intimate friend, but that was just to put off the gossip. I began to be aware of a change. Once or twice I caught his eyes fixed on me with an expression that was simply poisonous."

A sharp exclamation escaped from Pen.

"Made me damned uncomfortable," said Don. "Not that I was afraid of him, poor little runt; but one hates to know that there are ugly feelings like that around. He got in the way of giving Dongan his orders. He and Dongan became quite thick."

"Did this have any effect on Mr. Dongan's attitude toward you?" asked Pen.

"Yes," said Don. "Now that you speak of it, I had noticed for some time past that Dongan had been acting queerly toward me. Our relations were a little strained, but I never gave it much thought."

"Would Mr. Dongan have consulted Mr. Riever about his speculations?" asked Pen.

"Sure! Any tip that Riever let drop would be received as gospel."

"How about that stock you spoke of?"

"Union Central?"

"Do you suppose Mr. Riever advised Mr. Dongan to buy it?"

"Scarcely. Scott Riever's on the board of Union Central. He would have inside information, if anybody had."

"But suppose Mr. Riever purposely advised him wrong?"

"Why should he?"

"To get at you through him."

"Good God!" said Don.

There was a silence, while each was thinking hard.

"Wait a minute!" said Don. "There's a flaw in your reasoning. How could Riever have known that Dongan was trying to put it off on me?"

Pen shrugged.

"Who knows what may have passed between the two men? A suggestion may have been dropped."

"I have it!" cried Don. "Riever could easily tell Dongan to put the orders through in my name, so that it would not be guessed that the tip came from him. Everybody knew Riever and I were at outs, you see."

"Well, there you are," said Pen.

There was another silence.

"You know what I am thinking," said Pen at last.

"My God, yes!" cried Don. "Me, too; but it's incredible!"

"Somebody shot Collis Dongan," said Pen simply. "*Somebody who hated you*; for look how cleverly the crime has been fastened on you. That is no accidental train of circumstances. *Your* revolver! And somebody keeps sending stuff to the newspapers that is cunningly designed to poison the public mind against you."

"But how could Riever get away with it?" asked Don in a maze. "He's too public a character—like some sort of potentate, you know. He never goes out alone. Even if he dropped his bodyguard, every newsboy on the street would recognize him."

"I don't suppose he did it himself," said Pen; "but with his money he could easily get it done, couldn't he? One reads of such things."

"But if I was his mark, why didn't he take a shot direct at me?" Don inquired.

"That wouldn't satisfy a man like that," said Pen. "Instant death is painless."

"But what do you know about Riever?" asked Don.

"My intuition tells me," she said simply. "For years he has been jealous of you—jealous of everything you were that he was not. It was like a corroding ulcer in his breast. That letter, of course, brought it to a head. Don't you see? To drag you down, to disgrace you so completely, to bring you to such an unspeakable death—that is the only thing that would give him satisfaction."

"Good God! I can't grasp such fiendish villainy!" cried Don.

"I can," returned Pen quietly.

"Suppose we're right," said Don. "What good would it do? There is not a scintilla of evidence!"

"He showed his hand once," replied Pen, "in offering that reward. Your going away on a trip was the one thing he couldn't have foreseen. It has upset all his calculations."

"The reward aroused my suspicions," said Don; "but it's not evidence."

"We'll get evidence."

"We're up against it, all right!" Don went on harshly. "What is known as the Riever group in New York controls a billion dollars, I guess."

"Then you're satisfied that I was right, aren't you?" asked Pen.

"How do you mean?"

"If you gave yourself up, you'd be playing directly into Riever's hands."

Don dropped his head between his hands.

"You're right!" he groaned. "But, good God, how am I going to stand it?"

Poor Pen! Her breast yearned over him; her arms ached to enfold him; but she could only sit there like a wooden woman, staring at the ground. There was nothing she could have said that would not have been a mockery.

"I ought to be in New York," Don said at length.

"You couldn't make the trip just now," Pen replied quickly. "If you only had somebody there to act for you!"

"I have friends, plenty of them," he said gloomily; "but whom could I trust in an affair of this sort? It's not their loyalty I doubt, but their good sense. Anyhow, how could I get my side of the case before them?"

"Couldn't I carry messages to your friends?" asked Pen diffidently. "Perhaps I could find some one competent to act for you. Perhaps I could get acquainted with Riever. If I could see him, I'd know. A woman might discover his weak spot."

"I wouldn't let you have anything to do with Riever," he said quickly. "He's a swine!"

Pen was charmed by his proprietary air.

"Besides, all that would take money," Don went on dejectedly. "I have only a few dollars. A check would be useless."

"Perhaps I could find the money," murmured Pen.

"I couldn't let you do that," he said painfully. "Please don't speak of it!"

"But if it is necessary!" she persisted. "This is no time for the silly little conventions of life. We must speak of it again. What time is it?"

He flashed a pocket light on his watch.

"Two o'clock."

Pen rose.

"We must hurry," she said. "It gets light at four, and we've a long way to go."

"Where are we going?" he asked.

"To the main woods, up the Neck. The detectives and the reporters are housed within a quarter of a mile of this spot. If they look around at all in the morning, they can't help but discover the path that leads here. Strangers wouldn't be kept off by the bad reputation of the place."

"How can we get away without passing them?" Don asked. "Give me some idea of the lie of the land."

"The woods are full of old roads," Pen told him. "Since I was a child I have been exploring them. Some were laid out by my grandfather, for the gentry to drive over. Others have been cut for the purpose of taking out logs. Across the pond there's a road that comes down to the shore. We must make our way to that."

VII

AGAIN they went through the business of packing up, and in a few minutes they were ready to start. With Don's flash light Pen searched all about the clearing, to make sure that no evidence of his sojourn had been left there. He made a bundle of his tent and tied it on his back. He took his grub basket in his hand, and stuck his hatchet in his belt. Pen stuffed his bundle of clothes into the grass bag, with the things she had brought.

They started down to the water's edge. Don's spirits instantly began to rise.

"I feel like a human being again," he said, "instead of a caged rat!"

From the spring Pen struck into the underbrush, using Don's flash light to pick her way slowly and cautiously through the tangle. A few yards back from the water's edge it was more open.

"We'll leave a wide open track behind us here," she said; "but I don't suppose those New York detectives are very good woodsmen."

"Why couldn't we wade around the edge of the pond?" he asked.

"The bottom is soft. We'd sink to the knees."

Finally they struck into the old road, where the going was easy. They could walk abreast.

"When dad sells wood, they haul the logs down here to the water's edge and float them out to the bay at high tide," said Pen.

She warned him to avoid the paler spots in the road. These were patches of sand.

"Doesn't matter so much if they find my

tracks," she said. "Anybody around here would tell them that I am always wandering about."

It was a hot, still night with distant lighting. Something seemed to press down upon them from above. The woodsy smell compounded of leaf mold and pine needles was extraordinarily pungent. The silence under the trees was absolute. Not a leaf rustled, not a bird cheeped, not an insect strummed. Only when they paused to rest could they hear little stealthy stirrings in the mold.

"Mink or weasel," said Pen.

Though they had now put their enemies far behind them, out of respect for the great silence they still talked in murmurs. The wild creatures were less sensitive. Once they heard, quite close, the sharp bark of a fox, and again from farther away a wild laugh came ringing.

"What's that?" asked Don, startled.

"Loon," said Pen. "There's another pond in that direction."

Little by little they became one with the night and the wildness. Their worldly concerns slipped off; their breasts were light. It was enough merely to smell, to hear, to stretch their muscles.

"Why do people live in houses?" queried Don.

"Poor things! They know no better," said Pen.

More than once the road forked, but Pen always made her choice unhesitatingly.

"How can you be so sure in the dark?" he asked.

"I just have a general notion," she laughed. "We couldn't go far wrong. The bay is on one side of us, the fields on the other."

After a long walk they came suddenly to the edge of the woods. A rail fence divided woodland and clearing. There was a barred opening into the field. Pen dropped her bag on the other side and vaulted over like a boy. Don, more heavily encumbered, had to climb over. On the other side some dim shapes rose awkwardly in the grass and trotted away.

"My sheep," said Pen. "I know where we are. I mended that fence myself to keep them from straying."

At one step they had entered the civilized world again. Up the river the steamboat blew for a wharf, and they could hear from far off the barking of a dog, and all those vague little sounds that rise from a

peopled land at night. The grass was populous with crickets, and the scene was made lovely by a myriad fireflies floating about like vagrant stars. The field was a broad one, and the going rough underfoot. Young pine trees were springing up everywhere.

"Hanged if I know where I am!" said Don.

"We're facing north now," replied Pen. "That pale glow in the clouds is the reflection of the lights of Washington, seventy miles from here."

"Fancy the nation's capital—and this!" said Don.

"That bunchy black shadow away off to the left is the grove of tall trees that surrounds our house. We have circled around it, you see. The long line on the right is the main woods, which fill the Neck for miles above. All our fields lie on this side, but the woods are gradually taking them back."

"If you put me in those woods, shall I ever see you again?" he asked apprehensively.

"Oh, it's not much more than a mile from the house. That's nothing!"

They came to another fence with a barred opening. Climbing over, they found themselves in a road.

"What road is this?" asked Don.

"There's only the one road," Pen said. "It runs back from the house between the fields and on through the woods up the Neck." She hesitated. "What time is it?" she asked.

The question brought back the painful things that they had put out of mind for a while. Their hearts went down together. He threw the light on his watch.

"Half past three," Counsell replied mournfully.

"Ah!" said Pen, with a catch in her breath. "I dare not go any farther with you. It will be light in half an hour. Do you think you could carry everything the rest of the way?"

"Sure, as far as that goes; but—but must you go?"

"I must. Listen—you are to keep along the road until it enters the woods. It dips into a hollow there, and fords a small stream. You are to turn to the left there—to the left, remember—and ascend the stream, walking in the water. It has a firm, sandy bottom, at least for a certain distance. As soon as you are out of sight of the road, better stop on the bank until

it is light, so you won't mire yourself or step in a hole."

He put out his hand to her.

"When shall I see you again?"

"You are not listening! You must keep on up the stream until you come to a clearing on the right-hand side. Up at the top of the rise there used to be a negro cabin, but it burned down. Only the chimney is standing. Don't pitch your tent in the clearing. It would be too conspicuous. Conceal it in the brush across the stream. I can reach you there direct from the fields. If I can't find you, I'll whistle like a whip-poorwill, and you must answer."

"When will you come?"

"To-morrow night—unless I should be prevented."

"Oh, if you are prevented—"

Pen laughed shakily.

"Not much danger. They'll have to be very clever to keep me in!"

He clung to her hand.

"Well, I'm not going to complain," he muttered.

Pen clasped his hand in both of hers.

"Oh, I know how hard it is!" she cried.

"Try to be patient. It may not be for long."

"It cannot be for long," he muttered.

"A man has his limits!"

"The search may drift away from Broome's Point," she said eagerly. "Anything may happen. To-morrow night, when I come, I'll bring you some books."

"Books!" he exclaimed scornfully.

"Well, anyway, at night we can wander around where we please."

"If you work all day, you've got to have your sleep at night," he said doggedly.

"Sleep!" said Pen. "I've got all the rest of my life to sleep in!"

He was still clinging to her hand.

"It's so hard to let you go!" he murmured. "Could you—oh, I know I haven't any right to ask it, in my position!"

Pen hated his humility. She stamped her foot.

"Any right! What's your position got to do with it?"

His head went up with a jerk.

"Pen!" he cried.

Pen was panic-stricken. "Good night!" she said, jerking her hand free. "The sky is getting light behind you!"

She all but ran down the road. Once she looked behind her. He was still standing there. If he had called her, she would

have had to go back, let the dawn break if it would; but he heavily shouldered his pack, and turned in the other direction.

At the breakfast table, next morning, Pen suddenly interrupted her father's endless, querulous complaints by saying:

"Well, how about me?"

He stared.

"Hey?" he said blankly.

"Do you suppose I'm enjoying the present situation? Stared at, spied upon, my house overrun with riffraff! It's simply intolerable!"

"Of course! Of course!" he stammered. "That's just what's troubling me."

"I want to go away until it blows over," said Pen.

Pendleton looked scared.

"But—but would they allow you to?"

"Pooh!" said Pen. "That threat of arrest was just a bluff."

"Where would you go?"

"Oh—anywhere."

"I haven't the money," her father said plaintively.

"I'd pay my own."

That old look of suspicion flickered up in his eyes.

"Where would you get it?"

"Well, I could sell my sheep."

"Sell your sheep!" he echoed. "Preposterous! Why, the sheep are the best part of our capital!"

"My capital," corrected Pen.

"Certainly," he said stiffly; "but I'm your father, I suppose. I have a right to prevent you doing anything so foolhardy, just to gratify a momentary impulse. I forbid you to think of such a thing! Never speak of it again!"

"Oh, all right," said Pen, dropping the matter so quickly that a more perspicacious man might have guessed she had not dropped it at all. As a matter of fact, as soon as breakfast was over, she took the newspaper to her room and looked up the quotations for sheep and lambs on the Baltimore market. Prices were low, but there was no help for it. She fell to studying ways and means.

Later she was moving about the house, setting things to rights, and always planning, planning, when she heard a musical, deep-toned ship's whistle from the river—the whistle of a stranger in those waters. She ran to the front windows and beheld a large yacht coming in from the bay.

The big craft was as slender and sheer as a pickerel, with a piratical rake to her masts and funnel. The morning sun showed up her mahogany upper works as red as blood, and dazzlingly picked out her polished brasses. A beauty!

An anchor was let go with a mighty rattling of chain, and the yacht slowly came about in the stream. Pen knew by intuition that her coming had something to do with the matter that filled all their minds, but pride forbade her running out of the house to find out. With a great effort of will she kept on about her work, possessing her soul in what patience she could.

By and by there was a *rat-tat-tat* on the seldom used knocker on the front door. Opening the door, Pen beheld a ship's officer in natty blue uniform and gold braid. He took off his cap and offered her a note.

It was addressed to herself. It was written on thick, creamy paper embossed with a crest and the legend, "Yacht Alexandra." It was brief:

Mr. Ernest Riever presents his compliments to Miss Pendleton Broome, and begs to know if it will be convenient for her to receive him this morning.

Pen's brain whirled. She lowered her eyes and gave herself five seconds to regain her balance. Finally the suspicion of a dimple appeared at the corner of her lips. She looked up.

"Please tell Mr. Riever that I shall be happy to see him at any time."

She went slowly upstairs to change her dress. The sheep were saved!

VIII

UNDER the awning on the after deck of the Alexandra, Pen was reclining in a luxurious basket chair, with her feet crossed on a rest in front of her. Her brow was clear, her lips smiling. To see her then, one would never have guessed that she had anything more on her mind than the deliciousness of luxury, which she was experiencing for the first time in her life. As a matter of fact, being a human, pretty girl, she took to it like a cat to cream.

She knew that she looked all right. Poor as they were, in Aunt Maria Pen possessed a laundress, one of a fast-disappearing race, and there was a bloom upon her simple gingham dress that matched her own flower-like freshness. It was mid morning, but her undone chores troubled her not a bit.

The Alexandra had been lying inside Broome's Point for two days. On the first day Riever had lunched with the Broomes, and yesterday he had returned their hospitality. Of the two, Pen's food was undoubtedly better, being fresher than the millionaire's; but she had tasted with delight all the expensive things she had read about, which never came to southern Maryland—caviar, *petite marmite*, *pâté de foie gras*, hothouse grapes, *marrons*, and so forth.

This morning Riever had insisted on having the Broomes to breakfast on the yacht. A few feet from Pen, the owner was sitting on the wide divan that encircled the stern rail. Pendleton Broome sat beside him, and on the deck between the two men stood a little table bearing coffee cups and a box of such cigars as the elder man had never whiffed before, even in dreams. Pendleton was holding forth to Riever in his usual style, while the millionaire, listening politely, glanced at Pen out of the corners of his eyes.

The coming of Riever had changed the situation not a little. The rich man moved like an unacknowledged monarch. The tale of his wealth compelled men's homage. In his presence all voices were prone to become silky and backs to bend.

Like many another monarch, he despised this homage, although he insisted on it. His more intimate creatures, therefore, were careful to cultivate an offhand, man-to-man air toward their master, while they utterly subordinated their souls to his. This just suited him.

Being what he was, Riever had only to drop a suggestion to Delehanty, the chief detective, to have all surveillance removed from Pen. She was now free to come and go as she chose. Of course, nothing further had been said of the proposed warrant for her arrest. Delehanty had become as obsequious toward her as he had previously been arrogant.

A curious relation existed between Pen and the millionaire. From the first he had been most courteous, but in the beginning it had been dictated merely by motives of policy. He could see a little farther than the clumsy Delehanty—that was all; and Pen recognized in him an adversary infinitely more dangerous.

But he had changed. The second time she saw him, she became aware that she had a power over him. In short, he was strongly attracted. Pen marveled at it.

Ernest Riever, who presumably had only to pick and choose from among the beauties of the world! Though she could not understand how it had come about, she rejoiced in her power, and had no scruples whatever against using it.

To any one else the explanation would have been obvious enough. It is all very well for a man to buy himself royally through a world of salable women, but it lays him open to a dangerous weakness. When he meets a woman who is obviously not for sale, he is apt to fall down before her most ignominiously. That was what had happened to Riever.

Just because he was so rich, Pen had instinctively adopted an independent air that piqued him intolerably. Then there was that highly individual charm of hers; and her independence was not indifference. With all his experience, Riever had never met a woman like Pen—or perhaps it would be more correct to say that a woman of Pen's spirit and transparent honesty had never before taken an interest in the ugly little man.

When she was with Riever, it need hardly be said that Pen was not nearly so honest as she seemed. In fact, she concealed herself behind her apparent frankness. That is the great advantage of having a naturally honest look—it enables you to lie so well when you have a real need of lying.

Since Riever had arrived, the two had been almost constantly together, and a sort of subtle duel was going on between them. Pen's object was to encourage him without giving him any real opening. He was the first man she had ever set out to encourage. It was a sufficiently intoxicating experience for the man. Pen's blandishments were very different from the sort that Riever had been accustomed to.

As for Pen's father, he had swallowed the lure of luxury, hook, bait, and sinker. At this moment, buttoned up to the neck in his old frock coat, he seemed to be perspiring satisfaction. He had come into the sort of life that he regarded as his own. It was a treat to see him stretch his arm over the stern rail and flick the ash off an expensive cigar with his little finger. Pendleton Broome was the sort of man who will always be flattered, because he asked for it so plainly. It was Riever's cue to encourage him to the utmost.

After his first meeting with the millionaire, Pendleton had said to Pen:

"I find I have not rusted out in my solitude. I can still keep my end up with men of the world. Riever listens to me with the most respectful attention."

Pen had smiled to herself without answering.

More had passed between the two men than Pen was as yet aware of. She knew that Riever had promised to look into the matter of the Broome's Point Railway, thus raising her father's hopes to the skies; but she did not know that the New Yorker had actually purchased half a dozen lots adjacent to the proposed terminal, and that the inside pocket of the old frock coat was at this moment crackling with crisp greenbacks.

"The original grade of the railway issues from the gully yonder," Pendleton was saying self-importantly. "The plan was to build a long dock straight out to deep water; but there's a shoal off the gully. My plan would be to have the tracks turn along the shore to a point below the house, where they could build all the docks they wanted right into deep water."

Riever gave him only as much attention as was needed to keep him going.

"But that would ruin the outlook from your house," he suggested idly.

"Oh, I shall not remain here after the railway comes," said Pendleton loftily. "I'd take an apartment in New York, and perhaps a house in Newport."

"Newport is not what it was," remarked Riever.

"Ah, the vulgar have taken possession, I suppose," said Pendleton. "My father had a place there. My childish recollections of it are most pleasant."

"People are scattered all over the map nowadays," said Riever.

"That, I presume, is due to the introduction of the automobile," said Pendleton.

He launched into a discussion of automobiles, of which he knew nothing.

Riever, listening gravely, sent a quizzical glance in Pen's direction; but Pen was not to be tempted into making common cause with him against her father. She looked blandly ahead of her.

Pendleton himself delivered them from boredom. He had observed Riever's interest in his daughter, and was not without his hopes in that direction, too. By and by he rose, saying with a self-conscious air:

"Er—I have some important letters to get off this afternoon. If you'd be good

enough to put me ashore, Riever? You needn't hurry, daughter."

Under other circumstances Pen would have been deeply affronted by his transparent ruse; but in this affair, as has been said, she had no conscience. She allowed it to be seen that she had no intention of moving.

Riever made haste to summon the boat. Pendleton went down the ladder in his absurd three-year-old straw hat, bobbing his head and waving his hand airily. Toward the sailors his air of mingled condescension and good fellowship was delicious.

Pen glanced at Riever through her lashes as he returned to her. The little man held himself stiffly in his blue yachting togs, and walked with a suggestion of a strut. The greatest tailor in the world could not endow his meager frame with beauty or grace, but it was not to be denied that his wonderfully made clothes lent him a certain distinction.

He patted the cushions of the wonderful divan that encircled the stern.

"Wouldn't you be more comfortable here?"

"Impossible!" drawled Pen.

"A cigarette?"

"Never learned how," she said. "I'll make my first trials in private."

"I'll send you a box."

He sat down and feasted his eyes on her openly.

He was no beauty. His face was a little reddened and roughened with incipient erysipelas. Don had said that he and Riever were of the same age, but the millionaire might have been of any age between twenty-five and forty-five. There was no look of youth about him.

He was redeemed from insignificance by his assured habit of command; yet his assurance did not go very deep. Pen had discovered that he could quite easily be put out of countenance, only nobody ever tried it. When he chose, as at present, he could be most agreeable; but his eyes always had a look that may be seen in the eyes of a bad-tempered horse.

A curious thing was that in his endless conversations with Pen, Don Counsell was never referred to, except in the most casual manner. Each had a secret to guard here, and Pen kept hers better than the man did.

Riever wished it to be supposed that he had just happened in at Broome's Point on his yacht; that his coming at this time

had only the slightest connection with the pursuit of Don Counsell. Pen knew better, of course. On every hand she gathered evidence that Riever was the head and front of the pursuit. Riever was the secret source of the hideous clamor raised against the man whom Pen knew to be innocent. Twenty times a day he gave himself away to her love-sharpened eyes; but it was not evidence!

Meanwhile they fenced with each other.

"You should not encourage dad in his delusions," said Pen.

"You mean about the railway?" replied Riever. "I could put it through with a nod of my head, if I chose."

"But you won't," she said.

"How do you know I won't?"

"You are only humoring him."

"Good Heavens!" he said in mock dismay. "Do you undertake to read men?"

"I don't undertake it," replied Pen.

"You can't help seeing what you see."

"I could put it through," he said again, "if there was sufficient incentive."

"Of course," said Pen, and let the matter drop.

He was trying to make her beg for the railway. What most fascinated and provoked him in her was his inability to make her ask him for anything or take anything from him. Everybody else in the world asked him for things, one way or another.

"That's the trouble with life to a man like me," he presently went on. "I have no particular incentive to do anything."

Pen refused to recognize his money.

"Why haven't you the same incentive as other men?" she challenged.

"What are men's principal incentives?" he parried.

"Well, love, ambition, the desire to excel other men, I suppose."

"Yes, one could go far for love," he said with a sidelong look.

Pen, without looking at him, was aware of the look.

"Men are funny!" she thought. "He's trying to make me philander with him in a crude way. If I did, he'd weary of me immediately."

It was Riever's desire to shine in her eyes that frequently betrayed him. She was not impressed by his wealth, and he had to find some way of making himself out a remarkable figure.

"How about hate as an incentive?" he said presently, with a casual air.

Pen pricked up her ears.

"I always thought of hate as destroying a man, instead of nerving him to do things," she answered, just as casually.

"Not at all," he said. "Hate will carry a man as far as love—or farther." His feelings got the better of him. He forgot his casual air. "There's more in hate than love," he went on with glittering eyes. "Men get tired of loving, but never of hating. There's more pleasure in hate, because you never can entirely possess your lover, but you can destroy your enemy! Do I horrify you?" he asked with a sudden harsh laugh.

"Not in the least," replied Pen coolly. "Nothing of that sort horrifies me, though I might have to pretend to be horrified."

"Not with me," he said, showing his yellow teeth.

"It is comfortable not to have to make pretenses," Pen said.

That was as near as she could come to philandering.

"I believe you'd make a good hater," he hazarded.

"Maybe," said Pen. "I've never had the experience, like you."

An instinct of caution occurred to him.

"Oh, you mustn't take me too literally," he said, laughing. "I haven't anybody to hate at present; but I have the capacity."

It was too late. His glittering eyes had reminded Pen of Don's phrase—"An expression that was simply poisonous." It was precious evidence to her heart, but, unfortunately, not the sort of evidence she could take into court.

She was reluctant to drop the subject of hatred.

"The Borgias were good haters," she remarked. "I lately read a story which told how Alexander Borgia caused a bed to be made for his enemies. It was so arranged that when a body warmed it, it killed like a hammer stroke."

"A fanciful tale!" said Riever. "All the killing poisons I ever heard of have to be introduced into the stomach, the blood, or the lungs."

He spoke as one who knows. Pen, wondering, pursued the subject with further questions. It was like tapping a hidden spring in the man. With a curious relish, he described the action of various poisons on the human system.

"Cyanide is the neatest," he said. "There's your hammer stroke!"

"Has he tried that, too?" Pen thought.

"Collis Dongan was shot!"

She betrayed nothing in her face, but suddenly, with an uneasy glance, Riever was impelled to explain how he came by so much knowledge.

"You see my hobby is raising fruit," he said. "My peaches have scores of enemies—suckers, chewers, fungi, and bacilli. I have to study to keep ahead of them."

But he had been talking of the human system!

She couldn't appear to pin him down, of course. She had to let him range where he would, contenting herself with giving the talk a little push this way or that when the opportunity offered. She encouraged him to talk of his childhood and youth, which he was nothing loath to do. He unconsciously drew her a picture of a willful, jealous, destructive boy, a little monument of selfishness.

There was a bad crack in his nature. He seemed to hate beauty, moral and physical, but particularly physical beauty. Pen marked the pained sneer with which his eyes followed the stalwart young steward who carried away the cups. Riever had to have handsome servants, to maintain his position; but their comeliness was a perpetual reproach to him. No wonder he had hated Don Counsell from the first, Pen thought! She guessed darkly that Riever was the kind of man who pursues beautiful women only to hurt them.

He had been telling her, with a laugh, of the torments to which new boys were subjected in the fashionable school he had attended. One poor little wretch, it appeared, had been driven by his persecutors to the point of attempting suicide.

"Weren't you sorry then?" asked Pen.

"No!" he said. "I had to go through the mill when I came. It wasn't my fault that this kid had a soft streak in him. Besides, conscience is only another name for weak-mindedness. I made up my mind early that I'd never be sorry for anything I did. A strong man laughs at conscience."

"Funny kind of strength!" Pen thought.

This was all very well, but what good did it do her? They might talk for a month of mornings without getting any further; and she had not a day to spare.

How was she to get facts? The obvious thing would be to bribe his servants, to have his effects searched, and so on. This was impossible for Pen. She almost de-

spaired of ever bridging the chasm between surmise and fact.

IX

THE motor boat which had taken Pendleton ashore had proceeded to Absolom's Island for the mail. It was now to be seen returning. This was Riever's own private mail service. On the day of his coming, deciding that the regular mail was too slow, he had instituted a double automobile service between the island and Baltimore. Twice a day, by this means, he received his letters and the New York papers—particularly the papers. Pen had already marked with what a curious eagerness he awaited the latter.

When the mail bag was brought to him, he said, after a momentary hesitation:

"Put it in the saloon."

Pen noted the eager roll of his eyes toward the bag. There was something in there that he desired to see even more than he wished to cultivate her company. With the idea of seeing the thing through, she said carelessly:

"May I see a New York paper?"

"Certainly," he said, and had the bag brought back.

It was emptied out on the seat beside him, and he handed Pen a paper. She opened it, and feigned to read. At first he pretended to ignore the rest of the bag's contents, and sat there as if awaiting her pleasure; but he was uneasy. His feet moved; his hands twitched. Finally, as Pen showed no signs of losing interest in her sheet, he picked up another paper and opened it with hands that trembled a little.

Pen found that she could not watch him from where she sat. He held his paper between them. She lowered hers and rose. He was all attention.

"This hasn't got what I want," she said.

"May I see another?"

Without waiting for him to hand it to her, she picked up another paper, and seated herself on the divan with only the mail matter between them. From this point of vantage she could watch him very well without appearing to do so.

He glanced over his sheet and she over hers. "Glancing," however, does not convey the strained intentness with which he was searching the news columns. Pen observed at once that it was not the Counsell case that interested him. That still occupied a prominent position on the first page,

but his eyes merely skated over it. It was something else that he was looking for. He turned to the second page, and his intent eyes traveled it column by column.

On the third page they came to a stop. Pen saw his grasp tighten on the paper until the edges of his thumb nails turned white. A little knot of muscle stood out on his jaw. Unfortunately, Pen could not see his eyes, but from the tenseness of his attitude she guessed the look in them.

Whatever it was that he read, it was brief. He relaxed; a long breath escaped him. He let the paper fall, and turned to Pen. Cynical satisfaction was writ large in his face. He all but laughed in his relief.

He made no further pretense of reading the paper, but lit a fresh cigar, and, cocking it up between his lips, puffed away like a man well pleased with the world.

As well as she could, Pen had marked in her mind the spot on the third page where his glance had rested. It was the New York *Courier* that he was reading. She had to be careful not to betray her hand. She made believe to go on searching through the paper she had. Finally she let it fall.

"It's not here, either," she said.

"What's that?" asked Riever.

"One of the New York papers has a fashion department they call 'A Daily Hint from Paris'; but I don't know which one it is."

"Can't say that I ever noticed it myself," said Riever, grinning. "Try the *Courier*."

This was more than she had dared hope for. She took the paper from him with a hand that she forced to be steady. For a while she turned the pages in the haphazard way in which one searches through a strange newspaper. Riever, meanwhile, was sitting beside her, regarding his cigar with half closed eyes, and making a little humming sound between his teeth. Clearly he was intent upon thoughts that were miles away from her.

Pen ventured to let her gaze rest on the third page. The make-up of that page, news and advertisements, was such that she had little difficulty in picking out what she was looking for. There was but the one short item of news near the bottom of the page, in the middle column. This is what Pen read:

EAST SIDE GANGSTER MISSING

A girl who gave her name as Blanche Paglar, of 399 Elizabeth Street, became hysterical at po-

lice headquarters this morning upon being informed by the police that there was no clew to the disappearance of Henry, *alias* Spike Talley, twenty-four, same address. The girl had previously reported that Talley had been missing since the night of May 27. She received scant sympathy from the police, who told her that if the young man had met with foul play it was probably in the pursuit of his own nefarious occupation. Spike Talley was known as a member of the notorious Chick Murphy gang, and is suspected of complicity in half a dozen crimes of violence.

Pen turned a little giddy. Her heart pounded so loudly that she thought Riever must hear it. Dared she credit what this story implied? Had she come upon the key to the whole mystery? She leaned back in the divan and held the paper up in front of her, so that he could not see her face.

When her breast quieted down, she sternly reminded herself that this was slender evidence on which to build a case. She might be mistaken altogether. She might be merely reading into the item what she desired to find there. She determined to put it to the test; but she had to wait awhile before she dared trust her voice.

It was Riever who broke the silence by saying coaxingly:

"Put down the paper."

Pen did so. Her face was perfectly composed now, and her voice was even as she said:

"Here's a curious little story."

"What's that?" said Riever.

"A girl goes to the police for help in finding her lover. They laugh at her because he was a gangster."

For an instant Riever looked at her like an animal at bay, his teeth showing, his eyes senseless with terror. It was gone in a snap of the fingers, but it was enough.

"I guess that's common enough!" he said with a laugh.

"What a situation for a story!" remarked Pen.

"Oh, yes, if you like that sort of story," he replied, flicking the ash off his cigar.

"I have made a beginning!" Pen said to herself with a swelling breast.

No need for her to secure the paper. Those names and that address were etched on her brain.

Riever's start of terror had been due to a reflex action of which he was scarcely conscious. He did not suspect that he had betrayed himself. He must have argued that it was impossible that Pen should connect him with that item in the paper. Her

speaking of it could only have been a coincidence; so his satisfaction was still undisturbed.

They talked on about all sorts of things, but Pen was wild to get into action now. Her opportunity arrived when one of Riever's men came to ask if he had any orders for the boat. It was returning to Absolom's Island to get the regular mail, which arrived about noon.

"This would be a good chance for me to get my shopping done," said Pen. "If I might—"

"Certainly, if you must," said Riever. "May I come too?"

This was awkward, but it could not be evaded.

"It's your boat," replied Pen, smiling.

"Yours for this trip."

"Charmed to have you," said Pen; "but you can't look over my shoulder when I'm making my poor little purchases."

"I'll wait in the boat for you."

The graceful mahogany tender which lay alongside had cost as much as many a well-to-do man's cruiser. Nothing like her had ever cleft the waters of the Pocomico. She had the speed of a railway train. Pen was handed in to a little sheltered nook in the stern. Riever sank down beside her, and they were off with a leap, throwing a wall of water back from either side of the bow.

But Pen was oblivious to their passage. Her glance was far withdrawn.

"What are you thinking about?" asked Riever.

"My shopping," she answered instantly.

"It's quite a problem. There's so little to choose from in the island stores."

"Wouldn't you like to go up to Baltimore for a day?" he asked.

This was what Pen had been angling for.

"I might like it," she said; "but—"

She finished with a shrug.

"Well, there are the cars running up and down empty every day. Why not go up Monday morning?"

"Monday is wash day," objected Pen.

"Tuesday, then."

Pen considered.

"All right," she said. "I would like to go on Tuesday."

"That's settled, then!"

Pen saw from his look that he meant to come with her. That was to be expected. She must adjust her plans accordingly.

In three or four minutes they were at the wharf in front of the store. It was like

magic. The Pee Bee took a good twenty minutes to do it. Pen stepped out, a sailor was sent up to the post office, and Riever remained in the boat, a target for curious stares. He hated to be stared at, and presently he gave the word for the tender to wait out in the stream.

The store was a rambling structure, added to from time to time as business increased. The clerks were engaged in a continual marathon from one distant shelf to another. The three young men contended for the privilege of waiting on Pen, a prime favorite even with the touchy island people, who by turns resented and laughed at her father.

Pen was entirely unaffected and friendly, quite unconscious of her own reserve. In short, she kept alive a fine old tradition of gentility. She was "Pen" to the three youths, and they were "George," "Stanley," and "Roy" to her, yet a gulf separated them.

In order to keep up her rôle of shopper, Pen was obliged to purchase a chip basket, which she did not want, and a number of articles which she could use, of course, but which she had not intended to get that morning. Her purpose in coming to the island was to send off a letter. She could not write it in the post office, because the sailor from the Alexandra was waiting there; so she bought paper and envelopes in the store, and wrote it on the counter.

She had been revolving the opening sentences on her way over. So concentrated was she upon her task that the bustle in the store disturbed her not a whit. Through the open door she could see the mahogany tender floating out in the creek, with Riever sitting in his place and smoking one of his endless succession of cigars, and she knew she was safe from interruption in that direction.

DEAR BLANCHE PAGLAR:

I read in the *New York Courier* this morning of your search for Spike Talley. Perhaps I can give you a clue. I cannot hold out any hope to you that he is still alive, but in any case I suppose it would be a relief to you to learn the truth.

I don't want to deceive you. I am sure of nothing yet. I have only a suspicion. I thought if we could put what little I know with what you know, we might clear up the whole thing.

Having written this, Pen paused and re-read it with a frown. It sounded too cut and dried. She wished to win this unknown girl's heart. It was nothing to Pen, at that

moment, that Blanche had loved a gangster and was perhaps herself a criminal. All Pen considered was that Blanche had lost her lover, and that Pen's own lover was in terrible danger. That made them sisters. She continued, from the heart:

I am a girl like yourself. I understood much that was not written in the paper. Like yourself, I love somebody who is threatened by a worse fate than that which I suppose may have overtaken your friend, and at the hands of the same man. We ought to be friends. We ought to help each other.

Pen's eyelids prickled as she wrote this. She forced down the emotion, and continued more soberly:

I dare not write all I suspect to one who is still a stranger to me. Will you meet me in Baltimore on Tuesday at noon? I shall be waiting for you in front of the notion counter in Douglas's department store. Anybody will direct you to it. I don't know what you look like, of course, but you may recognize me by a blue silk turban stitched with red. My hair and eyes are dark. You may take a good look at me before you make yourself known, and decide if I look like a person who can be trusted. Don't speak to me if I am not alone. Even if I am alone, I may be watched, and it would be better for you to greet me like an old friend. I will inclose a post office order for fifteen dollars to pay your fare to Baltimore and back.

Pen was afraid to put her name to this. She hated anonymity, and realized that it would raise a justifiable suspicion in the other girl's breast; but within the past few days the newspapers had made the name of Pendleton Broome almost as famous as that of Donald Counsell. How could she take the risk? Suppose her letter ended in the newspapers? She turned hot and cold at the thought.

Even the postmark of Absolom's Island would give too much away; but she had to take that chance. She couldn't put down a false name, either. She signed her letter "your would-be friend."

When she finally held it, inclosed and addressed, in her hand, her heart failed her for a moment.

"It will only arouse the girl's suspicions," she thought. "She'll never come." Pen steeled her resolution. "In that case I'll go to her!"

Pen got a blank check from one of the clerks, filled it out, and cashed it. There went her chance of the new hat she needed so badly!

Leaving her purchases in the store for the moment, she went on up the road to the

post office. The store looked out over the waters of Back Creek. You went up a little rise and found yourself looking out over the river from the other side of Absolom's Island. The post office stood on the corner where the road turned upstream. It was only a couple of hundred yards from the store, but outside the range of Riever's vision from the tender.

The mail bus had just arrived, and some of the islanders were hanging about outside the little building, waiting for the distribution. During this interval the door was always locked, but Pen enjoyed privileges there. She knocked, and the postmaster, Sammy Cupples, seeing who it was, made haste to open.

She made out her application for the money order at the little desk in the corner, and Sammy paused long enough in the work of distribution to issue it, so that it might get into that day's mail. The bus went back immediately. It would reach Baltimore some time before night, and the letter would be delivered in New York the first thing Monday morning.

When it dropped into the mail bag, a tight hand was laid on Pen's heart for a moment, and she would have given anything to have it back; but the die was cast.

Pen returned to the store. One of the youths carried her basket out on the wharf. The tender swept around in a graceful circle and came alongside. Riever stood up to hand Pen in. The island boy's eyes goggled a little at the famous man. Riever looked his worst when he showed his yellow teeth in an amorous smile. Pen shuddered at him inwardly, thinking:

"You would not be smiling if you knew what I had just done!"

As soon as the man came with the mail, they sped back to Broome's Point.

X

It was night, and Pen was trudging along the road that led straight back between the fields. Under her arm was the inevitable grass bag.

Chin up and back very straight, there was always a sort of challenge in Pen's gait. As a child she had been just the same—one of those adorable little fighters who conceal a heart as tender as love itself. There was a photograph of her at the age of three with a look that was wistful, proud, and astonished at meanness. She still had that look.

A fantastic tangle of wild grape, trumpet vine, elder bush, and sassafras completely hid the rail fences and hemmed her in on either hand. An occasional pointed cedar or seedling cherry rose against the night sky. The middle of the road and the screen of leafage on one side were drenched with moonlight. The moon dangled in the sky like a hanging lamp; one could see into the depths beyond her.

Pen walked along with her face up to the moon in an attitude of surrender. All day she had been obliged to wear a mask, to weigh every word she uttered. What a relief it was at last to let go, to let the moon have its way with her, to bathe in its silver stream! Relief, in a sense, but hardly pleasure; for when she let go she was so defenseless, so quivering, that the stream of beauty hurt her. It enervated her so utterly that she was terrified lest she might not be able to gird herself up again.

For she knew that her respite was only momentary. She longed for, and yet dreaded, what awaited her at the end of her walk. She couldn't give herself up to Don as she could to the moon. She had to put on another mask for him—a mask of cheer. He was the charge that she had to watch over, and care for, and beguile into contentment. The fact that he hotly resented being a charge on her did not make her task any easier. They had been getting on each other's nerves a good deal.

Ever and anon, as she walked, she glanced over her shoulder, uneasily aware that a man could follow her quite close under the dark side of the green tangle, without her being aware.

At the corner of the last field on the left she vaulted over the low bars. Inside a figure rose into the moonlight and a voice whispered her name:

"Pen!"

She was horribly startled.

"Drop down again," she whispered sharply. "Don't come after me until I am halfway across the field."

He obeyed sullenly. Pen walked on across the field with a sore heart. She had made him angry now. All day she had lived for the moment of meeting, and now it was spoiled.

She headed diagonally across the field to the point in the woods that was nearest his camp. She could walk but slowly, because the ground was so rough—old corn land that had been allowed to go to grass with

the hills unharrowed. She would not look back until she was nearly across.

A man's figure was rising over the swell of the field behind her. Anxiety attacked her. Suppose it was not Don, but somebody who had followed her down the road! What would Don do?

She dreaded to hear the sounds of a struggle. Don could take care of himself, of course, but it would be the end of their secret. So well had that secret been kept that not one of all the searchers at Broome's Point now suspected that Don was still on the estate.

Pen waited alongside the fence that bounded the far side of the field. It was Don, so her anxiety was relieved on that score; but he did not come to her. A few yards away he leaned back with his elbows on the top rail of the fence, and gazed out across the moonlit field, making a perfect silhouette of masculine soreness.

"I brought you some supper," ventured Pen.

"Thanks," he replied ungraciously.

"Won't you eat?"

"Not hungry, thanks."

"What's the matter?" she asked with a touch of defiance; for she could not be meek, even with him.

"You spoke to me like a dog!" he burst out. "Down, Fido!"

"I'm sorry," she murmured; "but you startled me so. You see, I was thinking maybe some one was following me in the road."

"I just went a little way to meet you," he grumbled. "Nice welcome I got!"

Having said that she was sorry, Pen could not humble herself further. She remained silent.

"I suppose you're thinking I'm a thankless beast," he went on presently.

"No," said Pen.

"Well, I am. I appreciate what you do for me. Good God, that's just the trouble! You heap favors on me! You've got me on the rack!"

They had been over this so often!

"Well, I'm sick of it, too," Pen burst out as bitterly as he. "You're always trying to make out that I do things for you just to make you feel inferior! I hate to be benevolent. I never am; but what else could I do, under the circumstances—or you? Why can't you take it for granted?"

"You mean that you'd do as much for anybody?"

"Certainly."

This, of course, hurt him worse than what had gone before. He dug his chin into his breast and relapsed into silence.

Pen yearned over him. She loved him so for his male roughness, his wrong-headedness, his schoolboy pride. He was so absolutely different from herself—both weaker and stronger. It was circumstances which had given her the advantage over him; he was in a false position. She exulted in it a little, however she might protest to the contrary. It is sweet to have the ascendancy, even in love; and she could dimly foresee other circumstances in which she would be most terribly at his mercy.

She made overtures.

"I'm hungry," she said.

But the storm was still brewing in his breast.

"A couple more days of this, and I'll go clean off my head!" he said savagely.

"How about me?" said Pen.

"You don't have to squat under the bushes all day!"

"I have other troubles."

"I have things to bear that you don't know anything about. I have never spoke of them."

Instantly Pen, who had been feeling so pleasantly sure of herself, turned hot with jealousy. There was some other woman out in the world! Of course there would be! Don was tormented because he couldn't communicate with her, because he couldn't assure her of his innocence. How could she find out about her for sure?

"If you'd tell me what it is," she said, schooling her voice, "perhaps I could help."

"Not in this matter," he said with a bitter little laugh.

Then she was miserably sure. Nevertheless, she persisted, as the nightingale is supposed to press her breast against a thorn.

"I've often wondered why you don't allow me to write to some of your best friends—those you can trust, I mean. The letters could be worded in such a way that they'd mean nothing if they fell into the wrong hands."

"I've no one to write to," he said.

"Of course he wouldn't trust another woman to write to her," Pen thought, and was exquisitely unhappy.

"Any news?" Don asked gloomily.

"No," said Pen.

She had previously determined not to raise his hopes by telling him about Blanche Paglar until something had come of it. There was a long silence between them, and Pen became more and more wretched. When she could stand it no longer, she put the bag down beside the fence and said in an offhand tone:

"Well, I must be getting back. I'll come again to-morrow night."

She started to walk away with her sedate air, but a little quicker, perhaps, than would suggest perfect calmness.

Before she had taken three steps he came after her. Pen broke into a run. He overtook her. Ah, if he had only taken her in his arms! But he circled about her, spreading out his arms to bar her way.

"Pen, Pen, don't leave me!" he said imploringly. "That would indeed be the last straw! Don't leave me to brood over my own hatefulness!"

The pain in his voice arrested her. She forgot her own pain. As in a flash, she had a clairvoyant glimpse of what he must be going through day after day—a resolute young man compelled to skulk in the woods, while his name was bandied about with the stigma of murder upon it.

"I'm a fool to get sore," she said, with a shaky little laugh. "I won't go."

"Oh, Pen, you're so good to me!" he groaned. "I'm a stubborn brute, Pen—I can't thank you properly; but, Pen, I feel as if you were heaping a load on me that I can never struggle from under. I ought not to feel that way, Pen."

Ever since he had got hold of that little name he could scarcely address five words to her without using it, and every time he spoke it he caressed it. Pen was reassured.

"Don't worry about how you ought to feel," she murmured. "Much better for us to quarrel than to make pretenses to each other. Besides, a lot of that talk about doing things for people, and earning their gratitude, is false. A person has really no right to put another person under a debt of gratitude."

"The truth is that I'm afraid of you," he grumbled.

It was delicious to her to have him softened and faltering like this.

"I'm afraid of you, too," she confessed. "How silly we both are!"

For a moment or two they were wildly and unreasonably happy, standing there in the bland moonlight, close together, but not

touching. His face was in the shadow, but Pen could feel his eyes stabbing her out of the dark. They were like reeds shaken in the same gust. In that moment Pen knew that whatever bonds might be upon him out in the world, he was hers.

Still he did not speak; he did not draw her to him. In the end she had to wrench herself away from the magnetic attraction of his body, or else she must have flung herself into his arms.

"Let's walk," she said hurriedly. "We're safe enough in this out-of-the-way corner. You must need exercise. We'll circle around the field. Over in the corner there's a path leading down to an arm of Back Creek where dad keeps his boat in the winter."

Don came down to earth with a sigh. When his thoughts annoyed him, he had a curious way of shaking his head like a dog, to clear it. Without saying anything, he tied the jute bag to an overhanging branch, out of reach of four-footed prowlers, and came along with Pen.

They kept to the fence line, silent for the most part. Their breasts were oppressed by moonlight, that high, pure medium which nevertheless stirs us so poignantly. The moon herself is all very well in her way—a lovely lamp in the dark; but one can stare at the moon all night without being transported. One must turn one's back on the moon to experience her magic. It is the strange light she casts on the face of our mother earth, and earth's smile under the moonlight, soft, subtle, and infinitely suggestive, that thrills us, that disquiets us, that unlocks our spirits.

On the one hand, as they walked, the field lay spread with a bloomy, gossamer coverlet of moonlight; on the other hand, the swelling tree masses rose in rich velvety blackness under a lazulite sky.

Their two shadows soberly preceded them, always with a narrow space of moonlight between. Pen resented that little gap. She had forgotten about the supposed other woman, or, if she remembered, she no longer cared. She lived in the moment only; there was no more past, no future. She was in the grip of sensations that scarcely permitted her to breathe; yet she had to conceal from him the sighs with which she sought to relieve her breast.

Sometimes she fell behind a step, just for the satisfaction of looking at him without his knowing—at the way his hair curled

at the nape of his neck, at his flat, straight back, at the curious grace of his level walk. He was wearing an old pair of trousers and a shirt of khaki, which she had brought him as being less conspicuous in the woods than his own white clothes.

The moon was high in the sky, and their shadows were short at their feet. Pen beheld a curious thing. The dewy grass, refracting the strong moonlight, made a silvery nimbus around the heads of the two of them.

"Look!" she said, with her shaky little laugh. "We've been canonized!"

"Not I," he said. "They just let me walk under your halo."

Having circled around two sides of the field, they climbed over another pole gate and were swallowed up in the woods.

Instantly the silence wrapped them as in a cloak, and the heavy air became charged with a curious significance. High overhead they glimpsed the moon pacing with them over the tree tops. She splashed the trunks fantastically, and occasionally laid down a bar of silver on the path; but for the most part the underworld was black, black, black—a crouching blackness that seemed to hold its breath, as if in preparation for a spring.

The path was well beaten, but narrow. They had to walk in single file, Pen ahead.

"I'm glad you're here," murmured Pen.

"It's a fearsome sort of place," he said. "It was not like this the other night we walked through the woods."

"These woods have not been cut out," said Pen. "The old presences have never been disturbed."

Finally the path, with a sharp turn, brought them abruptly out under the open sky again. It was as if something had been lifted off their heads. They had come to a low bank at the head of a straight, narrow arm of water thrust into the heart of the pines. A great bird arose from below them and passed away like a shadow with a soft swishing of wings.

The patch ended in a shaky little wharf with a single plank laid upon it. They stepped gingerly out upon it, hand in hand, and stood looking down the reach. The south wind passed high above their heads, and the surface of the water was unruffled.

At the moment the moon was looking down the straight arm so squarely that one might have said she had cleft the opening herself with her silver blade of light. Down

at the end of the narrow inlet they had the sense of a wider body of water running at right angles—a pearly, fairylike strait.

On the point which separated the two bodies of water stood a little white house gleaming wanly in the moonlight. In a window of the house, a curious note in that dreamy world of opal and pearl, shone an insistent yellow light.

"Surely real people can't live there!" murmured Don.

"The worst kind, unfortunately," said Pen. "That's where the oystermen go to get drunk."

They retraced their steps up the bank. When they trod firm earth again, Pen repossessed herself of her hand.

"Where now?" asked Don.

"There's no place to go but back."

"Not yet," he pleaded. "Let's stay here awhile. There's plenty of time. There are no mosquitoes to-night."

An old skiff had been dragged up on top of the bank and turned over.

"Sit here," he urged.

Blaming herself for her weakness, she sat upon it with her hands in her lap. The moonlight was strong upon her. There was a wall of undergrowth at her back. Her face and hands stood out against it sharply. Don dropped to the ground at her feet.

"It's damp there," she objected.

"Can't see you when I sit beside you," he said. "I can from here. With only your face and hands showing out of your black dress, you look like a spirit."

"A lost spirit!" she said with her little laugh.

"Oh, Pen!" he pleaded in distress.

"Why should *you* be unhappy?"

His touch of sympathy unnerved her—that and the glamorous, destructive light that would not spare her emotions. The last of her defenses collapsed. In spite of herself, the tears welled up in her eyes and brimmed over. She lowered her head to hide them, but he caught the sparkle of the drops as they fell. It electrified him. He scrambled to his knees.

"Pen! Pen!" he whispered brokenly.

She covered her face with her hands. He dragged them down and crushed them under his own hands on her knees.

"Pen!" he gasped. "It breaks my heart to see you! What is the matter?"

She strained away from him.

"Nothing!" she said crossly. "I'm not the sort that cries!"

"But you're crying now—I see your tears!"

"It's nothing. I'm just nervous. Don't notice me."

"Oh, Pen, I love you so!" he groaned. "It kills me to see your tears!"

She looked at him with a kind of horror. He dropped his head in her lap.

"There, it's out!" he groaned. "All evening I've been fighting against it. Every night I've been with you. I swore I wouldn't tell you; but here I am—just like a baby. God knows I'll regret it to-morrow!"

"But why?" she gasped.

"Because it drives me wild to think of bringing unhappiness into your life. I'd sooner jump off the wharf yonder. It's unmanly to tell you now."

"Blessed unmanliness!" whispered Pen, brooding over him.

Presently she jerked her head up as if she needed more air, more light. The moon shone in her wet face. It was transfigured. He was still humbled over her knees.

"This isn't the way I wanted to come to the woman I love," he said bitterly. "I've nothing to offer you—less than nothing!"

"Do you want to buy me or to love me?" she murmured, with soft reproach.

"You can't respect a man who is as dependent on you as a baby!"

"Foolish one! What has respect got to do with it?"

"You can only be sorry for me."

"Foolish! Foolish! Foolish!" said Pen. "You must have got your idea of loving out of books. How selfish you are!"

He raised his head, struck by the word. Her voice deepened.

"Don't you understand how sweet it has been for me to work for you, to lie for you, to steal food out of the house? Why do you begrudge it to me? Oh, sometimes I could almost wish you *had* committed a murder, so that I could go with you and be disgraced with you!"

"Pen! Pen!" he cried, amazed and full of delight. Then he added quaintly, in a voice of reproof: "You're talking wildly!"

Pen laughed deep in her throat. She slipped off the boat to the ground beside him, where she could wreath her arms about him, and hide her face on his shoulder.

"You're only a man," she murmured, laughing and passionate. "What do you

know about love? Ah, only let me love you, and I will be content!"

"You'll see whether I can love or not," he said, piqued.

"Keep telling me," she murmured.

"My ears are starving for it!"

"I can't tell you to order," he grumbled, manlike. "It must come of itself."

But she knew from the timbre of his voice, from his arms, from the adoring droop of his head, and was content.

He held her a little away from him, that he might see her better. Pen yielded up her soul to him through her eyes.

"Good God, how beautiful you are!" he whispered.

Their lips came together. They achieved forgetfulness.

Even lovers must come back to earth. Pen drew away from him.

"The dawn will come and surprise us," she murmured.

He consulted his watch.

"Only half past two," he said.

"We must go."

"Oh, no, no!"

"Well, we must begin to go," she amended. "I can't leave you quickly."

She sat on the ground as Diana must have sat, her legs folded against her, her waist curving to preserve her equilibrium, both round arms up, and her fingers busy with her hair.

"How beautiful you are so!" he murmured. "Don't move!"

She laughed.

"Help me up," she commanded, extending him her hands.

As he pulled her to her feet, he was for enfolding her again, but she put her hands up between them.

"Not now! I want to get away from you a little."

"Pen!" he cried reproachfully.

She laughed.

"Dearest! I just mean you have numbed me. I must get away from you in order to realize you."

"You soon have enough of me," he grumbled.

"Somebody must be the first to stop."

"But you do love me, don't you?"

"Not always in the same way."

"You do! You do! I know it now!"

"Then why worry? Come, it's a long way back. We can talk as we go."

(To be continued in the October number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

Four-Eyes Einstein

THE REMARKABLE PUGILISTIC CAREER OF THE MARQUIS OF QUEENSBERRY LAWYER

By Myron Brinig

ALL of them have their little fads and fancies. Jack Dempsey, when he is not dusting off some contender, is romping about with his German police dogs. Benny Leonard is awfully particular about the part in his hair. It has to be just so before he will step in and show the world what he can do. Take that crafty little Johnny Dundee—he's just built himself and family the nicest home imaginable, and a home is the most wonderful of all fancies.

Then there is Georges Carpentier, with his shirts and neckties. Georges has it all over Valentino and Wally Reid when it comes to taking the eye—both in and out of the ring, if you get what I mean. But have you ever heard of Milton Four-Eyes Einstein and his glasses?

Lend me one of your ears, plug the other with cotton, and give me a listen.

Milton is his honest-to-goodness name, my pals—Milton. His brow is so high that you wouldn't believe him if he informed you that he is a prize fighter—a fighter who carries one of the wickedest rights in claptivity. He started out life as a lawyer—that is, he mastered Blackstone at the Columbia Law School; but one day he happened to read of Jack Dempsey's income tax. Then and there Milton began to believe that he was more nearly related to the Marquis of Queensberry than to the dignified but flabby-muscled Blackstone.

Here were lawyers scattered peevishly all over this congested island, which we ought to call "Madhattan," but don't—peevish lawyers eking out only so-so existences; and here was Kid Pug riding around in his latest model Rolls-Royce and taking the eye of the Avenue. Almost immediately Milton Einstein announced his intention of taking the manly art to his manly heart.

Old Moisha Einstein, Milton's papa, had other ideas.

"I think lawyers has got it a lot to say in America, Milton. In this country, the bigger a grafter what you are, the faster you own your own home and have a bank balance."

"Dad, don't forget that this is an age of punch—"

"Without a kick," put in Moisha.

"This is a punchy age, dad, and I guarantee you I will make more out of the fighting business in one night than I will make in a whole year practicing law."

"You with your weak eyes?" Moisha asked doubtfully. "You what has got to wear eyes-glasses before you can see yet a step?"

Milton carefully removed his pince-nez spectacles attached to a long black ribbon and blew on them reflectively.

"My eyes may not be precisely normal, dad, but they see a whole lot that others miss. If I become a fighter, the question, as old Bill Shakespeare would have it, is: 'To see or not to see?'"

"*Oy gevald!*" expostulated papa. "A prize ring fighter you should be yet, and maybe get killed. Prize ring fighting ain't what I would call a discount for cash."

"You see, dad, they'll think I'm blind, and they'll take me on as a sure cinch. How should they know that I have eyes in back of my head?"

So saying, Milton donned his intellectual equipment again, and looked more high-browed than ever.

"Can you name by me a fighter what is a gentleman?" papa demanded.

"Jack Dempsey, dad."

"He's a gentile!" scoffed Moisha.

Milton immediately switched to safer ground.

"Benny Leonard," he suggested.

"You mean that Leonard in the pants business?" asked papa, looking all the world like a *pater dolorosus*.

"And there's this side of the matter," announced Milton, undismayed by his father's ignorance of Leonard. "After I'm through in the ring, I'll go back to the law business and have all the fighters for my clients. The Marquis of Queensberry lawyer—the right prevails!"

"Well, maybe it ain't such a soap bubble, neither," averred Moisha. "Only tell me beforehand when they are giving you a knocking out, and I'll see if you can't get the insurings."

Behold Milton deserting the law for the jaw!

II

SPIKE MCGEE, physical instructor at the Cauliflower Club, and walking encyclopedia of pugilism, is the man to buttonhole on the subject of Four-Eyes Einstein. If you catch Spike in the right mood, he will tell you all about Einstein's dip into the turbulent seas of Fistiana.

"This guy Einstein comes to the club lookin' like he wants a nice, quiet spot to write a history of the world. Gawd! 'Pipe the perffessor,' I says to meself; but it seems as how Einstein wants to become a member of Cauliflower in good standing.

"Such a quiet-lookin' kid you never seen. Looks more like a musician or newspaper man than a pug. Holy Pete, an' he wears glasses—not ordinary blinkers, but the kind you got to lasso to your vest if you want to keep 'em. The only fighter I ever heard of who wore glasses was Teddy Roosevelt, and he didn't make no profession of it.

"'You're a potery writer, I take it,' I commences; 'or maybe you want to read the meter?'

"'I'm a fighter,' says Einstein, very cool like.

"'There is all kinds of fighters,' I says, very sarcastic; 'among 'em bein' booze and swivel chair battlers.'

"'All I ask is a try-out,' says Einstein. He goes to the dressin' room an' comes out lookin' as clean-cut and muscular as you want 'em; but I don't fall so easy, for all that.

"'You don't expect to fight with your glasses on?' I asks him. 'Take 'em off, if you value your eyesight.'

"So I takes Four-Eyes on for a couple of rounds; an' believe me, that fellow could see well enough to find moonshine in Kentucky. His great trouble is swingin' wild. If he should ever connect, I thinks, it's hello, heaven, how's the pearly gates?

"'Four-Eyes,' I tell him, 'you're a little wild, but so was Christy Mathewson when he started. You'll do.'

"At the next meetin' of the Cauliflowers I recommends him to be elected, an' he is.

"Talk about nuts, Four-Eyes is some chest-nut. He don't want a manager. He tells everybody that Four-Eyes Einstein is going to manage Four-Eyes Einstein. Then he turns around an' makes Lew Goldfish, our general office boy an' swamper, his assistant. They make the funniest team off the small time you ever glued your lamps on. While Four-Eyes is skippin' rope an' punchin' the bag, Lew is readin' him a book they call 'The Ruby at Ki-yam.' It's what they call a mystery story, the mystery bein' what it's all about.

"'Say, Four-Eyes,' I says, 'what's the big idea of havin' Lew read you potery while you're trainin'?'"

"'Oh,' says Four-Eyes, 'that's just one of my idiosyncrasies.'

"'Gosh!' I says. 'I thought the doctors had found a cure for that.'

"'Nero played a fiddle, didn't he, Spike?'

"'He did for all I know,' I says.

"'Babe Ruth plays golf, don't he, Spike?'

"'Wicked golf,' I says.

"'Well, 'The Ruby at Ki-yam' is my fiddle and golf,' remarks Four-Eyes, putting on his glasses without musing an eyelash.

"'A lot of good rubies at Ki-yam will do you, kid, if you can't see as much as the label on a ketchup bottle,' I wise-cracks.

"'I got second sight,' says Four-Eyes.

"'You'll need three or four sights to knock out Porky King, Four-Eyes. Porky is as nifty a light weight as ever wore a bath robe, an' I don't hold out much hope for you.'

"On the night of the bout between Porky an' Four-Eyes, I goes into Einstein's dressing room to see if maybe the kid hasn't got his trunks on inside out. There, in the middle of the room, sits Four-Eyes with his eyes closed an' his ears open, listenin' to Lew read 'The Ruby at Ki-yam.' This potery don't make much of a dent on my

mind; but I do remember a line that goes, 'Oh, wilderness were paradise enow,' an' I take it that Four-Eyes expects to be in Paradise after the first few minutes, with his face kissin' the mat.

"I see you're workin' your fiddle an' golf to death," I remarks. "Well, for the sake of the Cauliflower Club, I hope the fiddle don't break a string!"

"Four-Eyes goes into the ring with his glasses chained to his bath robe, and say, the crowd don't know whether to kiss or kill him. Even Porky laughs, thinkin' maybe how handy the winner's end of the purse will come in. Four-Eyes don't seem to mind the outburst. He puts on his glasses an' gives the crowd the four-over.

"Hello, dad!" he calls out to his old man. "Hello, Isidore Rosenbaum! Hello, Heimie Arnstein! How's business with you?"

"The bell rings all of a sudden, an' Four-Eyes takes off his glasses an' hands 'em to Lew through the ropes. All the time Porky is laughin' like he thinks Four-Eyes is a two-minute egg—soft and nourishing.

"But we live an' learn, as old John L. used to say every time he put over an excursion ticket into sweet, sweet dreams. Porky looks for an opening, intending to finish the party soon enough for an early supper; but Four-Eyes covers up like an old maid at the beach. Every time Porky thinks he has Four-Eyes on the run, Four-Eyes goes into a clinch an' gets in a few rib ticklers that Porky feels but don't see.

"Porky sure has the surprise of his life in the second round. He wades in, hopin' to catch Four-Eyes at his own game an' shake him up considerable in the clinches; but all at once Four-Eyes gets actin' up with his wicked right, an' let's swing the first clean blow of the bout. Zowie! You can hear that tap over in New Jersey. You can bet that Porky ain't doin' any more laughs. He looks as dazed as a bird gettin' out of a rush hour subway express.

"Well, what happens while the fight is on don't compare to the intermissions. Four-Eyes takes a bite out of an orange, puts on his glasses, an' begins talkin' to his friends.

"Hello, Mark, how's the baby? You owe me five dollars, you big bum!"

"Don't get excited, dad," he hollers to his pop. "There's money in it!"

"The fight don't seem to bother him any more than a flea bothers an elephant.

"Whang goes the bell, an' it's pretty to watch Four-Eyes slick off his glasses. He hands 'em to Lew, his office boy and librarian; an' Lew takes 'em like they was more precious than the treaty of peace. By this time Porky is gettin' madder than a corn what has been stepped on. He don't understand this guy Einstein any more than a Cousin Jack understands a sacrifice fly. Four-Eyes keeps coverin' up an' coverin' up, while Porky tires himself out tryin' to hit where the jaw ain't. Every time Porky misses, Four-Eyes kids him along with stuff that even Jack Johnson, the greatest talker of 'em all, would have envied.

"My dear Mr. Pork an' Beans," he says, "aren't you gettin' a bit rough?"

"An' zowie, Four-Eyes let loose one of his wild swings, an' the referee does a one-man relay race around the ring. Porky tries an uppercut that Four-Eyes blocks.

"Did you ever read the proverb, Mr. Pork an' Beans, about the snail that beat the hare? Well, you're the hare, all right!"

"Porky takes exception to these remarks, an' gets so mad that he puts down his guard, an' Four-Eyes pastes him a nasty clout on the mouth.

"Silence is golden," says Four-Eyes, meanin' that Porky couldn't say nothin' now, even if he wanted to.

"An' this is the kid they's been callin' cross-eyed, an' blind, an' near-sighted, an' everything else! It only takes that first fight to show me that his glasses is more trick than real. If he's blind, I'm deaf, dumb, an' crazy. After another intermission of toasts an' speeches, Four-Eyes goes back an' begins makin' Porky look like a novice.

"Porky," says Einstein, "you're *traje*, but I'm goin' to eat you even if it is against my religion to eat pork."

"That makes Porky sore as a fever blister, an' in his excitement he loses all control of himself. Four-Eyes sees his chance an' rips in his best bet—the wicked right. *Bam!* Porky gets it in the jaw an' falls into the next world for the count of ten.

"Boy! Page Conan Doyle!" says Four-Eyes. "Another poor gink has entered the spirit world!"

Spike McGee doesn't lie, boys!

III

PERHAPS Four-Eyes Einstein never achieved greatness as a fighter, but he became overnight the most unusual and

whimsical personality in the history of the ring.

"He couldn't stand up with the best," said Rex Tickard, the promoter; "but he's funnier than a display of crutches, and he draws the crowd."

Milton and his pince-nez led by a long black ribbon became the talk of the delirious Big Village. The newspapers fell for him like a Hindu low-caste falls for a rajah. Sport writers exhausted their lead pencils and blistered their fingers on a thousand typewriters in an effort to explain him to a waiting world. Famous cartoonists syndicated him from Portland to Pasadena as "The Harold Lloyd of the Roped Arena." A certain famous editor, who writes in the biggest type procurable, gave him a whole page in the Sunday supplement. Milton had arrived on all four eyes.

His next fight brought out the entire red-nosed and red-blooded population of the town. Some gossip had passed the word that the evening was going to be an entertaining one. All the young fans and old fans were there from Yonkers to Hoboken, from Fort Lee to Avenue A. From pit to dome, from skylight to basement, the Cauliflower Club was jammed. Tongues wagged, hips bulged, eyes rolled, dice shot mysteriously in and out of the aisles.

In his dressing room, Milton divested himself of his street clothes, whistling merrily in anticipation of a glorious victory. Suddenly, strangely, he became silent as a mourner. His face went blank and white with anxiety and chagrin.

"Lew! My God! Where are my glasses? *My glasses!*"

Lew's jaw dropped a full inch.

"Ain't they around your neck? Wait, I'll look!"

A frantic search through Milton's garments, everywhere about the dressing room, failed to reveal the optical instruments. Anxiety gave way to genuine alarm as overturned chairs, uprooted rugs, and sinister cracks in the floor refused to bring the two extra eyes into the light of vision.

Milton dashed desperately from one end of the room to the other, shaking himself as a dog shakes after an unwelcome bath, in hope that glasses would somewhere miraculously appear. Minutes dashed desperately into oblivion, the fight drew nearer, but the famous pince-nez remained somewhere secluded.

In deep desperation, Milton caught hold

of Lew's shoulders. In a hoarse voice he pleaded:

"Get me a pair of glasses! Anywhere! Hurry! Don't be gone five minutes! My God!"

And the hero of a thousand Sunday supplements mopped his brow ferociously.

Quick and sharp as a dagger thrown from the hands of a deep sea pirate, Lew shot from the dressing room on his important mission. One, two, three blocks he ran, and at last came to a pawnshop still open for business. Glasses were in the window, glasses were over the counter—thick glasses, thin glasses, glasses for far-sighted and near-sighted, glasses to the left and right of him. His not to reason why, his but to buy and fly, the precious specs carried next his heart. Back into the dressing room Lew burst as if discharged from some human machine gun.

"Here, Four-Eyes! Here they are! The guy tol' me they'll make you see things you never seen before. Ain't they pretty? Huh?"

Milton perched the strange blinkers on his nose, and then staggered back a pace.

"Holy Stanley Ketchell!" he murmured. "Where am I? Who is it?"

"S all right, Four-Eyes!" encouraged Lew. "S all right—you'll get used to 'em. Atta boy! Go in an' win! Atta boy! You'll get used to 'em!"

Milton staggered into the ring, although it seemed to him as if he were groping his way into four rings, each somehow a part of the other. The referee was blowing his nose loudly and introducing Killer Slevinsky of Paterson, the New Jersey Butcher. From all about came hot shots from hot throats.

"Slice him, Killer! Show him New Jersey has tough knuckles! Slice him, old kid! Eat him alive!"

Milton staggered into one of four corners. He ached to remove his glasses, yet he knew that they were his trade-mark. They must stay on until the fight! Hadn't Lew said that he would get used to them? Oh, speed the moment of getting used to them!

Again the referee blew his nose, a huge trombone of a nose.

"Milton Einstein, a member of this yere club!"

"Four-Eyes Einstein, you mean!" yelled some one up in the gallery—some New Jersey wit.

The nickname ignited the packed throng into a forest fire of laughter. The name spread and flared out into a heavy smoke screen of popularity.

"Four-Eyes Einstein!" yelled the young boys and old boys, the boys from Hoboken to Yonkers.

You will remember that some one cried: "I see you, Einstein! Come out from behind those windows!"

And do you still hear:

"Take 'em off, Milton, or you'll get a couple of glass eyes!"

But Milton only grinned. He was a game one, a gritty one, was Milton. He stumbled to the ropes and shook hands with the people there, and he was certain that each customer had as many hands as a monkey. Four hands at a time he shook, and laughed with his well-wishers and waved at his critics. Each critic had two heads apiece. Oh, Lord, speed the moment of getting used to them!

He peered intently through his glasses, trying to observe his acquaintances.

"Killer's in the ring, Four-Eyes!" shouted the New Jersey wit. "He's not out here! Get another pair of glasses!"

Every one laughed. The referee laughed so loud that he had to blow his trombone several times, in order that he might regain his composure. Killer Slevinsky, the New Jersey Butcher, laughed knifingly. The seconds laughed; but little Lew Goldfish, he who had been a swamper, a nobody, rose in his place and prayed—prayed that the glasses would acclimate themselves to the high altitude of Milton's nose—prayed for victory!

The gong! Time to begin!

Milton removed his glasses, and every pore of his body felt relieved. He handed them to Lew through the ropes, and Lew spat on them and rubbed them until they glowed.

Milton, in the ring, started going somewhere. In what place he would have landed, had not his father caught him halfway through the ropes, is a debatable question. Meanwhile Killer Slevinsky waited patiently in the center of the ring. Milton looked apologetic. He had been under the impression that Killer Slevinsky was out in the crowd somewhere. Well, let it go! His mistake!

The glasses, though removed from his nose, still weighed a ton on Milton's mind. The ring became for him a sinking ship,

pitching up and down, up and down. A strange dizziness communicated itself to his stomach.

Instead of one Killer Slevinsky, he saw two of the same species. He winked his eyes furiously. Was it possible that he was fighting twins? Or had Killer Slevinsky a dual fighting personality?

Milton was a first-class mathematician, and he reasoned that somewhere between the two Killers was the Killer with whom he must exchange blows. And he was correct in his reasoning; for, having advanced precariously to a place between Killer the first and Killer the second, he received, simultaneously, four breath-taking jabs in the stomach.

Our doctor of hooks and jabs thought it would be a good idea to aim for the first jaw within striking distance; but though he struck swiftly and surely, he hit Killer's mysterious twin instead of Killer the first. Milton was now quite certain that he was not getting used to 'em.

In another instant Killer Slevinsky had branched out into triplets. Four-Eyes discovered that he was fighting three separate and distinct Killer Slevinskys in as many separate and indistinct rings. Here was a problem guaranteed to tax the ingenuity of the greatest of battlers!

Reflection was dangerous, yet something must be done, and quickly. Four-Eyes let loose two mighty swings at two Killer Slevinskys, intending to come back later and finish up the troublesome triplet; but while he was punishing two Killer Slevinskys, the third Killer very cleverly managed to punish him. Ah, was there ever such a perplexing problem? Milton's knees began to wobble disconcertingly, and he thought that the mat was coming up to hit him.

And then the gong rang! Milton had to be guided to his corner, which confronted him like a masterpiece of double exposure, threatening quadruplets.

The Cauliflower Club howled and danced.

They furiously applauded the unexpected vaudeville performance.

Milton, true to past performance, donned the glasses, though he shivered as he did so. He feared to look at the crowd; and when he did, he saw thousands of customers striking together millions of hands. Many of them had double heads.

"Holy smokes! I didn't know there were so many Siamese twins in the world!" he whispered through the ropes to Lew.

"You'll get used to 'em, Four-Eyes!" encouraged Lew. "Wait till you get used to 'em."

But now there was a dubious note in Lew's voice.

Round two! And now a most peculiar spectacle met Milton's shimmering gaze. In front of him, stretched diagonally from one corner of the ring to another, was a whole regiment of Killer Slevinskys marching forward to meet him. There were at least twenty-five Killer Slevinskys in the parade, and each bore a tantalizing resemblance to the others.

Presently all of them rose on tiptoe and grinned an immense, fifty-foot grin. Milton felt doomed before this startling phalanx of grinning enemies, yet he did not give way before the oncoming horde. Impetuously he decided to strike the first of his opponents within arm's length. He let swing blindly with his right, and the whole line of crouching, grinning Killer Slevinskys toppled over with a neatness and precision that was extraordinary. Like toy soldiers, they fell and lay perfectly still.

One, two, three, four, five, six—

As Milton saw four referees uttering the word "seven," four referees somehow blending into each other, the whole line of Killer Slevinskys rose to their numerous feet and continued onward, a startling march of New Jersey Butchers.

Four-Eyes concluded, at that moment, that there ought to be more money in this fight than he had signed up for. He had agreed to meet one man, Killer Slevinsky. Some one had played a trick on him and shoved in the whole Slevinsky family album as his opponents. If Milton had only known the number of Killer Slevinskys there were in the world, he would have demanded so much per man, win or lose.

No sooner had Milton made up his mind to employ vigorous language to the four referees than the whole line of Killer Slevinskys reached out twelve rights, connected in one overwhelming detonation on the button of Milton's jaw, and sent him crumbling to the mat. Milton's last conscious thought was one of protest.

"Foul!" he mumbled, but no one heard him.

He whirled at a most remarkable space through a long black tunnel. When he reached the end of it, he found himself looking into the contrite, worshipful eyes of Lew Goldfish.

"It wasn't a fair fight," he whispered. "You couldn't expect me to whip a whole army!"

He saw two large tears fall from Lew's eyes.

"You didn't get used to 'em, Four-Eyes! Gee, what a boob I am! Out of a million pair of glasses I had to pick a dumb pair!"

"Take 'em back where you got 'em, Lew. They're near-sighted. Has the army been demobilized?"

Lew rapped his forehead sorrowfully.

"Nobody home in this little dome. I tell you, Four-Eyes, there was a million pairs—"

"Never mind, Lew. I lost because I was careless. It wasn't your fault. Trouble is, I forgot my idiosyncrasies. I learned a good lesson."

"Gee, who'd 'a' thought those things was so important?" Lew whistled. "Who'd 'a' thought?"

IV

At last came Milton's big chance. Cyclone Texas, former champion, sent forth the word that he was returning to the ring after three years in retirement. Cyclone had been a smasher in his day, and he had retired to his farm a world beater. Now he was coming back to recapture his old throne, along with a few thousand necessary shekels.

Cyclone was most anxious to win on his return to the ring; therefore he was not averse to a match with Four-Eyes. Milton's end of the purse was five thousand dollars—enough to put the Marquis of Queensberry law office on the map.

"Sure, I'll fight him," Cyclone Texas agreed. "But remember, you can't do anything to me if I kill him. You'd better buy him a new pair of glasses before the fight. I think his eyes need strengthenin'."

So Four-Eyes began training for his last and greatest battle. As the days preceding the fight grew fewer, the odds turned overwhelmingly in favor of Cyclone. No one really took Milton's chances very seriously; for how can a man fight who doesn't see straight?

Cyclone's training activities received wide publicity. It was reported not only that he had regained his best form of three years before, but that his retirement had actually benefited him. Everywhere the coming battle was regarded as a lark, a show.

Nevertheless, as Four-Eyes remarked to Lew just before the battle:

"We've got our idiosyncrasies working first-rate to-night, Lew. No chance of losing!"

Four-Eyes removed his glasses and kissed them affectionately. Lew followed suit and kissed that good book, "The Ruby at Ki-yam."

V

If you will drop in on Moisha Einstein any evening, he will eventually lead you into the details of that memorable evening—the evening when his son, Four-Eyes, met the famous Cyclone Texas in combat. Only it is necessary that you should give old Moisha a good cigar and wait until he has finished his cup of Turkish coffee. Then he will commence.

"Nu," I say to mamma, 'ain't you coming to see our Milton prize fight?"

"What?" she tells me. "See my boy maybe killed or sent to the hospital? No, Moisha, I stay at home. My heart ain't what it used to be."

"So I go with Sadie Cohen, Milton's best girl, what is now Mrs. Four-Eyes. Such a pretty girl you never seen it. Excited? My! Her face was burning like a fire. You see she loved it my Milton a whole lot. Already they was so good as engaged, and he was looking around for a nice little diamond without flaws and at a bargain."

"We come to the place where the prize fighting is going on, and we get good seats by the ropes, so if Milton should maybe fall through I can catch him. Not a cent it costs me and Sadie for tickets, because Milton has it a pull with the management. Right away I get in a fight because I step on a Irish loafer's foot. This loafer, he gets up and he opens his mouth so wide I think maybe he wants to have a tooth pulled. We has words."

"You big loafer!" I say to him. "Am I responsible for your feet when they ain't checked?"

"It looks like there is trouble home-brewing when my Sadie squeezes between us and gives the loafer a talking to."

"This is Four-Eyes's papa," she says.

"When the loafer hears-how so important I am, he shakes my hand and gives me *schnapps* from his hip pocket. Right away I get excited and holler:

"Ten to one on Einstein! Ten to one on Einstein!"

"Fifty sports, maybe more, bet me that my Milton will lose. Sadie, she holds it the stakes, which is easy a thousand dollars. D'ya understand? It is wonderful what a little *schnapps* will do."

"Pretty soon the hall is so full you couldn't get a needle in. And it seems by me that all the peoples has got *schnapps* by their hips. Over in one corner I see the president from our *schule*, and I holler over to him:

"Ten to one on Einstein!"

"Next day he makes me treasurer from the Bronx Charities Society. I tell you, it's something to have it a son who packs a wallop. *Sehst?*"

"All at once my Sadie, she grabs me by the sleeve and tells me so everybody can hear:

"There he is! There's Milton!"

"I see my son come into the square wearing a fine bath robe I keep in stock for the better class trade. Next day I sold it at a good profit. Red and green, it was, colors guaranteed not to run, and pure wool. Milton looks so smart with his eyes-glasses, like a doctor or lawyer. Never you think as how he is a prize ring fighter."

"Oh, deary, maybe you going to read us a sermon?" hollers the loafer sitting by me.

"That makes me mad, you understand, and I gives the loafer a mean look."

"A sermon wouldn't be such a bad thing for a loafer like you!" I give it to him.

"Right away he shuts up like a business what has gone bankrupt."

"My Milton he sits down in one corner, and begins making a how-d'ya-do to his friends and my customers. Everybody thinks he don't see with his eyes-glasses off, but later on they learn different. I tell you my Milton is a smart boy, and what he don't see ain't nothing to speak upon. Pretty soon he looks me over and hollers:

"Bon jour, papa"—which means 'good evening,' or maybe 'good appetite,' in French. I tell you, not many prize ring fighters can speak on them foreign lang-witches."

"Every loafer in the hall talks insults like—

"You won't be able to see anything when it's over, Four-Eyes!"

"Put down your wind shield, Four-Eyes—it ain't raining!"

"But Milton don't give it a knock for

such a kind of talk. He should worry! Say!

"Pretty soon this other prize ring fighter comes in. The referee gives him a big spiel.

"'Cyclone Texas, from San Antonio!'

"If you ask me, San Antonio is a rotten town for the clothing business. Then everybody who is owing me money stands up on the chairs and hollers:

"'Break his glasses, Cyclone! Show him how warm it is down in San Antonio!'

"In the next row is Tannenbaum, who I owe a past due account for pants; and Tannenbaum leans it over my chair and gives a whisper in my ears:

"'I hope your boy gets paid good money, Einstein!'

"Just like that! Some peoples ain't got no manners.

"The referee makes a speech like he wants to be elected for something, and the prize ring fighters shake hands—which, if you ask me, don't mean anything; only in America everything is opposite from what it should be. Then a bell rings, and I holler:

"'Fire!'

"The loafer sitting by me says it's only the fight commencing. Everybody gets excited. Milton takes them off his eyes-glasses and steps up to Cyclone Texas like he wants to kiss him. Smart boy! He hits this Cyclone so hard that already all the people what bet with me want their money back. I tell Sadie to put the money in her stocking. A man what is a man wouldn't rob a lady in such a place.

"This Cyclone Texas from San Antonio ain't such a *schlemihl* as what he looks. He begins making fancy steps, like the St. Vichy dances has got him in the feet. Pretty soon he makes my head so dizzy I feel like I'm taking a trip to the old country in the steerage; so I take another drink from the loafer's hip pocket.

"'Look out!' I holler to Milton. 'This Cyclone ain't to be trusted!'

"An' do you think I'm wrong? *Oy geweh!* This Cyclone Texas takes such a slam on my Milton's nose that the blood begins to come. Sadie, she begins to cry, thinking maybe there ain't going to be no wedding; but the bloody nose don't bother my Milton so much. He believes in paying back what he owes to get the discount, so he fights right back at Mr. Cyclone and gives him a locked eye. Maybe you think I ain't happy! Right away I jump up on

my chair so that the whole row behind me hollers:

"'Down, you poor simp! This ain't the seventh inning!'

"Quick like anything, this Cyclone hits my Milton a terrible one in the stomach.

"'Why don't you throw on him a chair?' I yell to Milton. 'He's a low-life robber! Why don't you throw something on him?'

"They mix it up like a bargain sale when the bell rings, and the first square is over. Next day I read in the English papers as it was Cyclone's square, and in the Jewish papers as it was Milton's. I never believe what the English papers say. All lies!

"My Milton goes back to his corner and puts them on his eyes-glasses.

"'He won't be able to put them on when the fight is over,' the loafer sitting behind me says.

"This makes me so mad I reach over and pull him off his seat. Somebody grabs me by the feet and somebody by the hands. They have to sit on me to hold me in my chair, so mad I am. It looks like there is going to be two fights for the same money when the bell rings and the second square commences.

"Milton goes straight for this Mr. Cyclone and punches him, *eins, zwei, drei* punches in the stomach. Mr. Cyclone grabs my Milton like if he wants to make love; only it ain't love so much as married life—punching where nobody can look. The referee he don't care so much what happens to him, so he jumps in the middle and pulls them one from the other, like they was taffy candy.

"Mr. Cyclone ain't yet satisfied. He grabs it a hold of my Milton again, like he wants to pay him back a loan; but my Milton is smart, and gives Mr. Cyclone a nice little present in the ribs. After that there ain't no more love making. They fight like two dry goods stores in the same block. Mr. Cyclone wants to put Milton out of business, and Milton makes a sale of punches at a bargain.

"Then something happens that I won't never forget so long as I'm living. Mr. Cyclone catches my boy under the chin and knocks him down on the floor. I think maybe my Milton is killed, and begin crawling by the ropes to ask him maybe he would like a drink of *schnapps*. Right away two policemen pull me away and throw me back on my chair, like I was a empty sack.

"'Doctor! Police!' I make a *geschrei*, but nobody hears me.

"'Maybe Milton is dead—who knows? He stays on the floor like he don't know anything is going on, and the referee adds up until he gets nine. Then like one from them jumping jimmies, my Milton gets up and hits Mr. Cyclone a fine one on the nose.

"'Hooray!' I holler. 'You can't kill an Einstein!'

"The peoples holler, too. Everybody is beginning to be my friend, even my creditors. Every square my boy fights better. Every square it looks like he is getting stronger and Mr. Cyclone weaker. Pretty soon Sadie begins making plans for the wedding.

"'Do you think we ought to go to Niagara Falls or Atlantic City for the honeymoon?' she asks me.

"'Wait,' I say. 'Don't count your chickens before the shell is yet broke. The fight ain't over yet, Sadie.'

"'But in my heart I know that Milton can't lose. It's like having confidence in goods. If a suit is all wool, you ain't got no trouble in selling it; but if it's cotton, then you got to worry. My Milton was all wool.

"In the eighth square, the Cyclone from San Antonio begins acting very careless with his prettiest features. He acts what you call him groggery. All the peoples is standing up and hollering like it's an auction sale.

"'Knock him down, Four-Eyes! Put the skids on him!'

"The ending comes quick. Milton gets mad, and Mr. Cyclone gets a cyclone on the jaw which blows away all his front teeth. The referee begins adding up again, and this time he don't make it no mistake.

"'Ten!' he says it, and then holds up my Milton's hand.

"Everybody in the hall acts happy, like if Jacob Ruppert is still making real beer. Right away Sadie reaches in the stocking for the betting money, and wants to give it to me.

"'Keep it for a wedding present, Sadie,' I say. 'I hope maybe it won't be long before you buy a nice little baby carriage with the money.'

"Next day Milton opens his Marquis from Kingsberry lawyer offices, and all the fighters come to him with cases—cases which they has got from a good bootlegger.

"It's a fine business, prize ring fighting, if you don't get killed!"

M I D W A Y

THE days crowd in upon me,
And noontime follows dawn;
Another night is on me—
Another friend is gone.

Oh, years so kind yet cruel,
Too fast you speed away!
Low on youth's heart the fuel
Is burning, cold and gray;

And where the roses flourished,
Kissed by the blazing sun,
And golden fruits were nourished,
The vines droop, one by one.

The circle dims and narrows,
The nightingale has fled;
A few low-chirping sparrows
Fly round my flower bed.

The leaves are rustling sadly
On many an autumn lawn;
Ah, once I sang—how gladly!
Now one more friend is gone!

Charles Hanson Towne

The Bull Whip

HOW EMMA CADBURY LEARNED THAT A DOCTOR'S WIFE
MUST NEVER BETRAY HER HUSBAND'S CONFIDENCE

By Ellis Parker Butler

ONCE in a while you hear some one say that such and such a man ought to take a whip to his wife—that it is the only thing that will do her any good. It is not only men that say this. Possibly I have heard the expression forty times during my life, and at least twenty times women have used it.

Usually the statement, "The only thing that will ever do that woman any good is a sound beating; her husband ought to take a whip to her," is made in an offhand way. It does not mean much. It suggests that the speaker does not know what he would do if he had a wife of the sort under discussion, and he puts forth the whip idea in lack of anything better. If the wife was his, he would not use a whip.

The only case I can recall in which a whip did cure a wife was that of the wife of Dr. Cadbury, of Black Springs. I'll tell you about it.

Cadbury was a rather fine fellow and a mighty good physician. The only practice in Black Springs was general practice, and that, of course, was what Dr. Cadbury had. He came to Black Springs as a young man, rather slender and with friendly eyes, as soon as he finished his postgraduate work at a St. Louis hospital, and was taken in partnership by old Dr. Whitehouse, who was almost ready to retire.

The old doctor died a year or two later, and Cadbury inherited all his practice. Being a bachelor, he had been boarding with Whitehouse, and he continued there. Old Mrs. Whitehouse and her daughter Sally were glad to have him.

This continued very comfortably for something like fifteen years—perhaps a few years more than that. Cadbury gradually secured the best practice in the town and county, had his automobile and his horse

and buggy and sleigh, and trained Hank Stevens to handle the automobile as well as he naturally handled a horse.

The doctor was forty, or close to it, before he married. He was stout but not fat, full-faced, and ruddy in complexion. He wore loose garments, well made and comfortable. He had never worn hair on his face. He was in every way a good, solid citizen, always ready to smile, to shake hands, to exchange a hearty word or a joke. He was an honest church member and a director of the Black Springs Bank. He belonged to three fraternal organizations, and took an active part in their affairs. A good fellow, sound and sane, and an excellent physician, capable of handling any ordinary surgical operation as well as need be. He took time to go to St. Louis and to the Minnesota Rochester, now and then, to keep up to date; and he actually read the medical magazines he subscribed for.

The indications were that in time Dr. Cadbury would be much stouter than he was when he married. He was good-natured and happy and satisfied with things, busy every minute, cheerful when he had to make night calls, and everybody's friend.

He chose as his wife a handsome, well-built woman who came to Black Springs visiting Sally Whitehouse. She was six or eight years younger than the doctor, and as lively as a schoolgirl. She was a great talker, always chatting cheerfully, mingling her talk with good-humored little laughs, and dressing a little better than was the rule in Black Springs. Every one liked her as well as they liked the doctor, and we all thought it was a good match. We all considered Emma Cadbury a worth while gain for the town.

In a town of fourteen thousand people a prosperous physician is an important citi-

zen. He looms large. His wife comes into a social position that is as good as any in the town, if she wishes to occupy it, and Emma Cadbury did wish to.

Dr. Cadbury bought a house that was not too showy, and yet worthy of himself and his wife. He had an office built out from the south side of the house, with a small entry where he could knock the snow from his coat or change his muddy boots. Emma saw that the entry and the office were properly furnished. She even bought a new bronze cuspidor, for tobacco-chewing was the greatest of Cadbury's vices and his worst habit. He found solace in the bad habit during his long, cold country drives, I imagine.

As far as I know, Emma never objected to this habit. She took the doctor as he was, ready made—which is the way one has to take a bachelor of forty years, I imagine. She accepted him, and they fitted together as one hand fits another in a friendly clasp.

Before long the doctor's house was a social center, and Emma was in everything that was interesting. The house was conveniently located and large, there were as yet no children, and it was a delightful meeting place for committees, societies, card parties, and all the pleasant small affairs of a small city.

It was rather fine to see the doctor button his greatcoat and put one arm around Emma, as he kissed her, when he left the house for some call. She had a way of throwing up her chin after she had been kissed that was pretty, and any one could see the two were entirely and thoroughly in love. It would be hard to think of a house in Black Springs that spoke of more solid happiness and content than that house.

II

ONE evening Dr. Cadbury came home from a visit to a patient. It was summer, and he wore his linen duster and automobile goggles—which were still in style with him, because the summer roads were so dusty. He did not go around to his own entrance, but walked up the steps of his front porch, opened the screen door, and went in.

Emma was entertaining a visitor—Mrs. Blake, from across the way. The doctor greeted her in his usual good-natured way, pulled off his gloves, took off his goggles, and seated himself in one of the green wick-

er chairs. He said he was tired, but did not say it in a way to indicate that he was overtired, and he chatted with the two women until Mrs. Blake had to go home to get supper. Then he turned to his wife.

"Emma," he said, "you're fine! I bless the day I set eyes on you, and I bless every day since then. You're a splendid wife for me. I wouldn't trade you for any wife in America. You know it, I guess."

Emma looked at him. For the first time she noticed that his face was solid, if that is the word. She had always thought he was good-looking and well built, but now she noticed that he had a strong mouth behind the smiles, for he was not smiling. He was serious.

She was not frightened, but she felt an inward gasp, as if her heart was gasping. It was not much—about the sort of gasp a woman's heart gives when she has something on the stove that she does not want to have boil dry, and suddenly remembers it after she has forgotten it. Something was the matter, and she did not know what it was.

"Yes, Ben?" she said questioningly.

"Well, it's just this, Em," he said. "A doctor's wife is in a peculiar position, in some ways. She is all the better for being friendly, but she can't talk too much—or, I ought to say, she can."

For a moment Emma looked amazed, almost frightened.

"Ben!" she cried. "Have I been talking? Have I been saying something I should not?"

"Seems like, Emma," he answered, still seriously. "I don't want you to feel hurt or anything, but a doctor has to be close-mouthed most of the time, and his wife the same way."

"Oh, I know that, Ben!" Emma exclaimed. "I do know that! Have I—have I told something terrible?"

"Well, no—no," he said, but still seriously. "No, Emma, I would not say quite that. Just careless words; but I don't like to have things about my patients come back to me as having been told by my wife. It is a thing that must not be. You can understand that, Em. If it gets around Black Springs that it doesn't do to go to Doc Cadbury, because his wife talks about the patients—you can see that, as well as I can. It doesn't do. A doctor's wife must not talk."

"I'm so sorry!" she said honestly.

"Of course. I just spoke of it, Em, because these things are better if we talk them over—have it out clean and sweet. So that's all of that. What's for supper this evening? I'm starved!"

Dr. Cadbury did not worry any more. His wife did worry. She was afraid of her own tongue, and she was right in being afraid of it. It had always been her most unruly member. Sometimes she was amazed to remember the things she had said.

Some men and women need no wine to intoxicate them; talk does the work for them. The effect of hurried and eager conversation has exactly the same effect on these people that alcohol would have. They become excited, their pulse quickens, their cheeks glow, a trapdoor seems to close the thinking part of their brain, and the remembering part pours out its contents, hit and miss, helter skelter, in a flood. It is all innocent, it means no evil, but it often does grave harm.

Emma Cadbury was weak in that way. Her tongue sometimes ran away from her and said things she would never have said if she had time to consider them. In one sense it was because she was generous. She felt, when conversation was hot, that she ought to give as much as she got, and more.

A week or so after the doctor's first suggestion that it might be as well for Emma to be a little careful, he had to mention the subject again.

"Emma," he began, but there was no need to say more.

The moment she saw his mouth and heard the tone of his voice she knew what he was going to say.

"Oh, Ben, Ben!" she cried. "I've been talking again!"

"Yes. I'm sorry, Emma, but you have been."

She put her head in his lap and cried. There was no make believe about it. She cried hard, and it was from her heart. She was disgusted with herself, ashamed of herself.

Dr. Cadbury was as kind as he felt he ought to be. He talked to her seriously, while he stroked her hair.

She asked him what it was she had told, and he explained, giving all the details this time. It was nothing very bad in itself, but that did not relieve Emma. She blamed herself as sincerely as if her careless tattling had resulted in death.

Cadbury was glad that she took it seriously, and hoped that this would end the trouble; but it did not. The next matter was far more serious. It was this next matter that led to the use of the bull whip—not because it was so heinous, but because the doctor felt that he must either end the thing then and there or come to hate the wife he loved so dearly.

III

THERE was in Black Springs a family that had never seemed to do very well. George Miller was a well-intentioned man, but he had been bitten by one of those queer religious bugs that come into existence from time to time in out-of-the-way places like Black Springs, India, and New York. He was a Low Chanter.

The Low Chanters were good people, and harmed no one. Their leading oddity was a belief that a certain verse in the Bible ordered them to chant continually in a low voice. There were not more than twenty of them in Black Springs, but George Miller was their leader, and people looked on him as a freak. He wore his hair long and chanted unceasingly, interrupting himself, when asked a question, only long enough to say "Yes, yes!" or "No, no!"

The chant was a sort of singsong crooning, not unpleasant, but rather a serious drawback from an employer's point of view, if a man happens to be a clerk in a store. George Miller dropped out of the commercial life of Black Springs and took up whitewashing, wood sawing, and such other odd jobs as could be done while he crooned. With his large family and his slight physique he did not get on very well in a worldly way.

His third daughter was May Miller. She was a pretty girl, and a little rebellious because of her distaste for the crooning of her father and mother. One evening she got into rather serious trouble.

Partly because she was a good stenographer, and partly because he wished to help the family in any way he could, Joe Hendricks, the cashier of the bank, had given May a job. It was a fine thing for the family and for May, and it came at a time when she needed money if ever a girl needs it, for Chester Brown was looking her way with rather loving eyes.

Chester was a young man and a clean one, upstanding and thoroughly fine in every way. He belonged to one of the

churches and to the Y. M. C. A., and was of the clean-cut religious type, and yet not particularly bigoted. Every one liked him, and when he began paying attention to May Miller she was more than happy.

She was ready to fall in love. She was the sort of girl that inevitably would fall in love, and Chester was the best man in the world for her to fall in love with. As soon as he looked her way, she was ashamed of several things—of her uncouth clothes, and of the way in which she had let herself drift toward another young fellow.

Getting the position in the bank was a fine thing for May. Dr. Cadbury, who kept a somewhat careless but interested eye on most of the people in town, was pleased in an unexcited sort of way. May was none of his particular business, but he was glad to see a good-natured, pretty girl, such as May was, trend toward something better rather than something worse.

The young man who might have been Chet Brown's rival was Dare Brown, Chet's cousin. He was one of the town "sports"—easy-going, all for a good time, and not worth much one way or another.

Now the chances are that a girl who has had a good home training, with sound and sane religious experience at the base of it, will be right and stay right. It is the same with a boy, for that matter. It is different with a girl or boy who has been brought up in a home where some freak belief has obsessed the parents.

If that girl or boy has a trace of skepticism—as youth should have in its attitude toward oddities—there is going to be more or less desire to get away from the thing that has made the home folks seem odd. Sometimes an unsound religion drives youth to say that it has no use for any religion. Sometimes, in getting away from what it is ashamed of, youth takes to a sound, helpful, stabilizing belief. Which it is to be depends quite a little on the companions the boy or girl happens upon.

May Miller had happened on Dare Brown, and that was bad for her. Her father and mother scolded her about Dare—which made her like him all the better. He was the representative of the come-easy, go-easy life. Before she knew it, he had May thinking in terms of extra short skirts, and red hats with showy red plumes, and late night motor parties.

Then Chet began to notice May. It changed her entire view of life. It made

the Dare Brown sort of thing seem tawdry and cheap.

One night—a Saturday night—May told her mother she was going down town. In Black Springs our main street is quite gay on Saturday night, and nearly every one goes down to promenade up and down once or twice. It is the custom. May wanted to see Dare Brown, for what seemed to her a very good reason. She wanted to see him in order to tell him that she did not want to see him any more.

It was not until about ten o'clock that she saw him. She had given him up, and was on her way home, when he ran his automobile up beside her and hailed her.

"That you, May?" he asked. "Get in!"

"No," she said, "I'm going home now. I've been looking for you. I must go home now."

"I'll take you there."

When she went close to the car, to get in, she saw that there was a couple in the rear seat. Dare threw open the fore door, and May got in. Then Dare swung the car to the middle of the street and stepped on the gas. He stepped on everything that would make the little car jump over the road. It passed May's house in a flash.

"Dare!" she exclaimed. "You said you would let me out!"

"That's all right," he said. "In a minute. I'm just going to take these two home first."

May looked over her shoulder at the two in the rear seat. They were a man and a girl, and were asleep, apparently, flopped one against the other. As the car passed a light, May had a fairly good view of them, but she did not know either.

"Who are they?" she asked Dare.

"Nobody much," he said. "They're due back at Milltown."

"Dare!" May exclaimed. "You're not going to take me all the way to Milltown before you take me home? I won't have it!"

"Don't know how you're going to help it," he replied.

Neither did May know. She did know that Dare had been drinking. Milltown was a mere thirteen miles from Black Springs—twenty-six miles there and back—and the car would take less than an hour. She needed an hour to tell Dare what she wanted to say, she thought.

She began to tell him. It was that she

did not want to see him any more, and that if he thought they were engaged she did not want him to think so.

Dare hardly listened. Almost as soon as May began to speak, he began to sing; and when he sang the car did about what it chose to do on the road.

"Please don't!" May begged. "Please attend to your driving!"

"Then don't give me any of that nonsense," Dare said.

May kept silence. What she wanted to say would have to wait.

They had almost reached Milltown when they passed Dr. Cadbury's car, jogging along at its safe pace of twenty-five miles or so. They reached the outskirts of Milltown, dodged around the cars of the homeward bound farmers, turned into the main street, and—hit a telephone pole.

May and Dare were thrown out of the car and onto the sidewalk, and the two in the rear seat were thrown forward against the seat in front of them. Altogether it was a rather minor accident, but it drew a crowd instantly.

Dare lay unconscious. May Miller was on the pavement beside him, groaning with pain and holding her arm, when Dr. Cadbury drove up. He jumped out of his car, pushed through the crowd, and got ready for business. Half a minute assured him that there was nothing the matter with Dare, who was regaining consciousness.

"Get him into my car, Hank," he told his man. "I'll look the other patient over a little."

"They got what was comin' to them, all right!" one of the bystanders said.

"That so?" the doctor asked, as he kneaded May's arm, trying it for a broken bone. "How do you mean, friend?"

"Joy riders," the man said. "This guy I don't know, but that feller in the car is a drummer—sellin' brass earrings or something, I guess. He's been at the Commercial House a week or so. Him and this feller has been riding these hotel girls around every night—hittin' it up pretty lively, too, I guess."

"Just so!" said Dr. Cadbury, getting up from his knees and helping May to rise. "Well, we'll just move on now, I think."

He looked at the two in the car.

"Hurt any?" he asked, and they denied that they were.

May was leaning against the telephone pole, rubbing her elbow and weeping gently.

"Dare," the doctor said, "it's a good thing you've got a head like a steel box. You can see that these two get to the hotel, or you can leave them here. They don't interest me—not much, anyway; and I guess you can get home by train, if your car is out of shape."

"That's all right, doc," Dare said.

"I'm going to take this lady home," the doctor went on, taking May by the arm. "I'm not quite sure about her arm. You don't mention her name—you understand? You've forgotten she was with you."

Dare grinned.

"I'm mum!" he declared. "And I'm awful sorry, M—"

"Hush!" growled the doctor.

"That's right," Dare said. "I'll keep my mouth shut."

He tried to say how grateful he was to the doctor, but Cadbury had no time to listen. He had driven out to see one of his "chronics," and he must make the call, cutting it short and hurrying back to Black Springs with May.

On the way May told him how she had happened to be in the car, and the doctor swore a little. He believed her, but he knew what even the most distorted gossiping can do to a young girl's reputation.

"You'd better let me do some white lying for you, May," he said. "I don't think that arm is bad. I'll have a look at it when we get to Black Springs. How would it be if I just said I had picked you up to bring you home? No bad lie there, is there? And I'll get around that arm somehow. What if I was to say this door of mine is always acting up? It is, ain't it? And nothing about Milltown or our young but gay friend. Better that way, I guess!"

IV

AND it might have been all right if Dare Brown had been utterly bad. Unfortunately, he was man enough to worry about May. He telephoned to ask how she was, guessing rightly that the doctor would take her to his office for a look over. Mrs. Cadbury received his message, knew his voice, and told him that neither May nor the doctor was there.

"He went to Milltown to see a patient," she said.

"Yes, I know," Dare said. "All right—never mind!"

The doctor entered the house almost immediately. May was quite herself again,

but was inclined to hold her arm with her hand. He took her into his office, looked at the arm, laughed at it, and then opened the door and called to his wife.

"I've got May Miller in here," he said. "She bumped her funny bone, and I've been having a look at it. I'll run her around home, Emma, and be right back."

Next day the Black Springs newspaper had a brief item saying that Dare Brown had been summoned in Milltown for reckless driving, and fined ten dollars. In a day or two it was generally known that he had been going the pace in Milltown for several days. It became quite a scandal.

Then Dr. Cadbury began to hear that May Miller was the girl with whom Dare had been going the pace on his trips to Milltown. One thing followed another. Joe Hendricks, the bank's cashier, told the doctor he had had to let May go—the bank's customers demanded it.

"Nothing in that story," the doctor said. "I know about it. Deny it, Joe!"

"Well, I don't know, doc," Joe said doubtfully. "Seems to be pretty straight. Comes from a reliable source, I may say. Matter of fact, doc, they seem to have got it from your wife."

"Huh! That so?" the doctor asked. "Well—all right!"

He was not angry. At no point of the affair was the doctor angry. He was hurt and ashamed and worried, but not angry. With a word here and a word there he tried to correct the story about May Miller. He told the whole thing as it had happened—as May had told him it had happened; but what chance was there of correcting what every one believed to be true?

When the news reached George Miller, humming away at his low chanting, he stopped chanting. He had a session with May, and it was not in a low chanting voice that he told her that she had disgraced him and all the Low Chanters.

The next day May was gone. It came to be known, weeks later, that she had gone to an aunt in Dubuque; but no one knew that then. It was supposed she had gone to Chicago, where most of the disappearing girls went, and the worst was thought of it.

Dr. Cadbury went to George Miller and asked the Chanter what he knew. All that the doctor got was—

"Hum de dum, dum de day—don't know—dum de day, hum de dum—don't care—dum de dum, de dum de day."

The doctor felt responsible, since it had been his wife who had said the words that seemed to have ruined May's life. He said he guessed he would run over to Chicago and brush up a little on his appendicitis methods. New ideas never hurt one. He wasn't quite satisfied with the way the operation on Mrs. Garzey had turned out, and there might be something new.

He gave Dare Brown the third degree, and was satisfied that the young man had no idea where May was. He spent a week looking for May in the city in which she was not, and then came home, tired and worried. Hank was at the station to meet him; Emma had sent the car.

As the doctor got off the train, Will Garzey, standing on the platform, hailed him genially.

"Back home, hey, doc? Learn a lot more? But I guess you always do. Not that you don't need it," Garzey laughed. "Understand your good wife says you weren't quite satisfied with that operation on my wife; but you're the only one that ain't. She's fine as a fiddle!"

"That's good, Will," the doctor said. "I never worried about your wife. I just thought maybe those swell surgeons over there had figured out some new fancy trimmings. Operation was all right enough."

"Suited the old lady and me, anyway," Garzey agreed.

Dr. Cadbury frowned as he got into the car.

"Hank," he asked, "how is Emma?"

"Oh, fine! Fine and dandy!" Hank said.

"Yes," the doctor said. "All right—we'll go home."

It was just after they turned away from the station that the doctor saw the bull whip lying in the street.

"Wait! Stop, Hank!" he said, and got out of the car and picked up the whip.

"Some whip!" Hank observed.

It was some whip. It was two yards long and a good inch and a half wide at the butt, made of stout cowhide, tapering to a cruel lash at the end. It was as flexible as a snake, black—the whips used to be called "black snakes"—and the butt was loaded with a slug of iron or lead. A man's cranium could be cracked by a blow from the butt of the bull whip. A bull could be knocked down with it.

The doctor held the whip in his lap and studied it and another matter as the car

went through the streets to his home. Emma came to the door to meet him, throwing her arms around him and kissing him, and he returned the greeting with no sign of declining affection. Hank carried his suit case into the hall, and went out.

"My! What is that?" Emma cried, laughing, as she saw the whip. "What a hideous thing!"

"I picked it up in the street," the doctor said.

He put the whip on the couch and began getting out of his coat. Emma helped him. She asked something about his trip, but the doctor did not answer.

"What is wrong, Ben?" she asked. "Aren't you well?"

"Yes, I'm well, Emma. I'm sick, too. Sit down—I want to talk to you."

"Ben! I've been talking? May Miller—is that it?"

"Yes, that's it, Emma," he said sadly. "I want to talk to you about that."

"But, Ben—please! Not now! Not the minute you have come back! Wait until after dinner, at least, please, Ben! I'll listen to all you have to say then. Don't spoil our first dinner after you have been away from me—please! We've got ready such a nice dinner, Annie and I—everything you like best, Ben."

As if to add to her plea, Annie came to the door just then to announce that dinner was ready. It is an indication that the doctor was not angry, but only just and sad, that he agreed to wait until after dinner. He had quite made up his mind.

As Emma went before him into the dining room, he looked at her. No blow of the whip should strike her above the waist. If she held her hands high, they would not be hurt. Her skirts would be torn, no doubt, for the whip would cut like a knife. Perhaps they would be torn quite from her. Luckily, Emma was not a feeble woman; she could stand punishment.

V

THE dinner was not gay.

"Now, Ben," Emma said, when they had finished, and she led the way into the living room.

"Emma," the doctor said, "I am not angry. I am not even cross. See, my hand does not tremble. I could go into an operating room and perform an operation at this very minute. And you know I love you."

"Oh, yes, Ben—yes!"

"I never loved you more than now," he said. "You know that, too?"

"Yes, yes—I'm sure of that!"

"But this business of telling a doctor's secrets must stop," the doctor said. "It must be cured. Emma, I cannot let it go on until I lose faith in you, wish you were not my wife, despise you and hate you. I must cure you. You have tried—"

"Oh, I do try!" she moaned.

"I know—I know just how it is. It is something you can't help. It is something that has not been broken out of you—something like a bad fault in a colt, Emma. Love hasn't been able to break it out of you, and sense hasn't been able to break it out of you. I am going to whip it out of you."

Emma turned deathly white.

"Not with—that!" she gasped.

"Yes—I brought it for that."

She opened and closed her hands, and looked toward the door. Then she put her hands on her bosom and bent her head.

"Yes!" she whispered. "I must be cured, Ben—yes!"

She covered her face and came to the center of the room. The doctor picked up the whip and drew the right sleeve of his coat a little higher on his wrist.

"Hold your elbows higher," he said.

He swung the whip and brought it against her just below the waist, where the long stays protected her. The bull whip curled around her waist, and the lash caught on some button or bit of trimming and clung there.

From the dining room, just across the hall, there came a roar like the roar of a wild beast. A hand clutched the doctor's arm and swung him around, staggering him. Emma screamed, and leaped to grasp the whip, but Annie, the maid, had wrenched it from the doctor's hand.

"You hit my lady?" she shouted, her eyes tiger wild, and she raised the whip and brought the lash singing and stinging against the doctor's cheek. "You take whip to my lady?" she cried, cutting him across the legs.

She was strong; she was a powerful woman. When the doctor, trying to hide his head between his shoulders like a turtle, tried to close in to wrench the whip from her, she sent him staggering backward with a push of her big hand and brought the mighty whip down on his back. She waled

his legs and larruped his arms. The three of them, at times, were locked together, but Annie pushed them away and swung the whip again and again.

"Annie, stop!" Emma cried again and again, but Annie would not stop.

The whip hissed and sang through the air and lashed the doctor's legs. Big welts began to stand out on his hands and face. He was being unmercifully beaten. Emma wept and pleaded, and the doctor struggled and swore, but big Annie was crazed with anger and would not stop.

"Run! Run, Ben! She'll kill you!" Emma screamed.

The doctor did not run, but put down his head and charged at Annie. Very deftly she shifted her grasp on the whip with a quick turn of her wrist, and met his charge with the loaded butt. It caught him on the side of the head, gently enough and with a soft, sodden sound. The doctor drooped down and lay on the floor. He was out.

"Huh!" Annie said, breathing hard. "Whips! I drive ox in old country!"

Then the unconventionality of her action seemed to strike her, for she added, with dignity: "I guess that be 'bout all. If you please, missis, I like to give notice I quit when comes two weeks. Maybe him don't like me much no more!"

Emma was kneeling by the doctor. She saw him open his eyes and look around dazedly.

"Oh, sweetheart! Dearest!" she cried, and kissed him again and again.

He took her hand.

"Emma, dear!" he said.

Then Mrs. Cadbury, gently stroking the doctor's bruised face, looked up at Annie.

"No, Annie," she said, "you shall not go. The doctor will bear no ill will; neither of us will. You must stay. But, Annie, remember this—not a word of this to anybody! Nothing that happens in a doctor's house, nothing that is seen or heard in a doctor's house, must ever be breathed outside the doctor's house—never! Never! Never!"

Annie shrugged her shoulders scornfully.

"Huh!" she said. "I should talk!"

BONES OF BOCCACCIO

[It was recently reported from Florence that the bones of Boccaccio had been discovered in a suburban villa]

BONES of Boccaccio! *Corpo di Bacco!*

Sounds like an oath—what a strange piece of news!

Found by some workmen, delvers in Florence—

Gently, oh, delvers! Dear son of the Muse!

Yorick! Poor *Yorick*—his skull, the mad fellow!

So here those old merry tales once had their home!

Who knows one is left in some corner or cranny,

Some laughter still lurking inside that old dome?

Petrarch's own brother, scholar and poet,

Here housed the learning that once like a star

Lighted Dan Chaucer in far-away England;

Spoils for the sexton, poor skulls that ye are!

Fair *Fiammetta's* delicate ashes,

Did they not stir at the news that we bring?

Blown dust thy hair is, and blown dust thine eyelids;

Blown dust the bosom this dust once did sing.

Skull of Boccaccio! Bones of the master!

Gather them softly and find them a place

Where cypresses wave in his Florentine garden;

Leave them to dream of her perilous face.

And I in the lamplight take down the old volume,

The merry old tales of the "Master Bocace";

And I think of those workmen yonder in Florence,

A skull on their shovels, and whisper "Alas!"

Nicholas Breton

The River's Daughter

HOW THE SWEET SINGER OF THE BARGE MISSED THE CAREER
THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN HERS

By Marian Graham

WHEN Stephen Wentworth's wife left him, leaving also a rather hysterical note pinned to his collar box, and ran away with Benny Freeman, she broke her husband's heart. It is a strange and sentimental thing to say of a man like Wentworth, who was generally assumed to be heartless, but it is nevertheless the truth. He fled New York immediately, and buried himself, for five years, in some forlorn and unknown outpost. Five years, and a rather unusual incident, effected a complete cure, although they added something of cynicism to the forthright character of the man.

The incident occurred in a small city, somewhere in the region of Wentworth's burial place. He had gone there to transact a little necessary business, to buy supplies, and to hear some good music. Then he firmly intended to return to his refuge.

It was with a sensitive shiver that he allowed the local lawyer, a round, cheerful fellow, to take him to a cheap vaudeville show. Wentworth had heard the concert violinist, and was in a hurry to get away; but only outright discourtesy, of which he could never be guilty, would allow him to decline the lawyer's invitation.

The lawyer, in his way, was a bit of a rounder. He liked the thrill of meeting the feminine performers after the show. It was easy to do so, for the house manager at the theater was his friend. He wanted to show Wentworth a good time. Instead, he showed him something quite different.

Before recording that incident we should say a word about Benny Freeman. Benny had met Alicia Wentworth at a rather bohemian studio party she had attended in Stephen's absence from the city. Skilled in nothing else, Benny was at least an adroit flatterer; and Alicia was an ideal subject

for that sort of hypnosis. She had long been convinced that as a modern woman she should have a career. Because she was rather vain of her slender little body, she elected dancing as her medium of self-expression.

Stephen did not oppose her in any way, but he did insist, knowing something about it, that she must study and work and practice hours and hours before thinking of making her debut. If you had known Alicia, you would know that the thought of work was enough to give her a headache. She liked to call herself "brilliant." She had the notion that something she possessed—variously labeled "personality," "soul," and "temperament"—was enough to make her greater than Pavlova or Duncan. All she needed was inspiration and a chance. Stephen supplied neither, and so she began to say that he did not understand her.

"Ah, but I love you!" he would reply, laughing, in order to stem one of her outbursts, which were becoming more and more frequent.

Benny Freeman was like Alicia in that he also thought he was "brilliant." He sedulously noted down the smart epigrams in books, plays, and magazines, and appropriated them as his own. In a vague way he was supposed to be a "theatrical man." No one knew him to do anything more theatrical than to use free tickets on first nights; but he called all the celebrities by their first names, except when he met them, and was an encyclopedia of the stage.

He was just the sort of man Alicia needed to understand her. He did. He understood her so well that he got her to leave Stephen, secure an unopposed divorce, and accept the ten thousand dollars that Stephen insisted upon giving her. Then he promptly spent eight of the ten thousand,

or said he did, on a production of which she was the *première danseuse*. Their marriage was postponed until Alicia had won fame.

When the show promptly failed, and Alicia won nothing but laughs for her dancing, Benny padded the expense account, pocketed what was left, and advised Alicia to look for a chorus job, where her insouciant face and graceful figure would earn forty dollars a week.

From *première danseuse* of her own company to the chorus, from the chorus to the four-a-day!

II

As he slumped down in his chair, yawning at the stale jokes of the blackface comedian, Stephen Wentworth thought of the blessed peace of his solitude. He paid no attention to the efforts of the performers. Acts came and went before his eyes, and he saw little of them. He was startled out of his inattention by the repeated nudging of his companion.

"Ah, the one on the end!" the lawyer whispered. "Oh, boy!"

Wentworth raised his bored eyes, and yawned. Then he stifled an exclamation of surprise. The "one on the end," who had caught the other man's fancy, was Alicia Wentworth—older, coarser, harder than the Alicia who had been his wife, but nevertheless Alicia, still slender, as she would always be, still depending upon "personality" and "brilliance" to win her audience. She smiled too consciously, Wentworth thought critically, and she danced with too much abandon and too little art.

Then she and the others of the small chorus began to sing. As always, Alicia was off key, and the harsh, untrained notes of her voice were disagreeable.

The act was an elaborate one for so cheap a circuit. Because of the deep set it required, it was next to the last on the program. Stephen watched critically until the curtain came down, and an Irish Italian bearing an accordion entered. The lawyer whispered something about going back stage, and Stephen got up.

He had not made up his mind about Alicia. He decided vaguely that it would depend upon her. He owed her nothing, he felt; and besides, he had very little money—which was the only thing she would want.

He stood in the dark wings while his companion bustled eagerly forward at the heels of his friend, the house manager. The little lawyer was still whispering:

"The one on the end!"

Wentworth overheard the introduction. He saw Alicia smile archly, flatteringly, at the lawyer. He heard the man's awkwardly phrased question about a little dinner; and then Alicia spoke.

"Well, old dear," she said, with a new nasal quality in her acceptance, "I don't care if I do; but lemme tell you I got a whale of an appetite!"

She and the town rounder laughed. Wentworth heard the man asking about "another girl for a friend of mine," turned, and strode out of the stage door. There was a broad smile on his face, and as he emerged into the street he burst into a loud, ironic laugh.

His broken heart was completely mended.

III

SOLITUDE began to bore Wentworth soon after his heart was whole. In two months he returned to New York, to hear some good music; and, as things happened, he remained to hear more.

The real story of Stephen Wentworth began one afternoon at a symphony concert. In five years he had heard no music like this. His heart beat madly, his pulse stirred, his brain was on fire.

Music, to Wentworth, was what liquor is to some men. Always it was the supreme intoxication, the strongest charm. And such music! He had lived for this day, and now he knew that he would never again be content with the woods of his exile.

Leaving Carnegie Hall, he tramped for hours and miles, neither knowing nor caring where he went. It was one of those clear, cold evenings in October, when every star is out, and the city is swept by new and beautiful breezes. The sky was a deep blue, the moon a cold sphere. As he wandered aimlessly, he came upon the river—a light silver ribbon caught up into graceful ruffles as it flowed to the sea.

What he saw did not impress him merely as things seen. The magic of the night, the wonder of the river, were parts of a vaster symphony than the music he had heard. They formed a recurrent fugue to which he had been deaf for five years, and they awakened him to a beauty he had some-

how associated with his idealized picture of Alicia—a beauty he had lost when he lost her.

He walked out to the end of a dock, deserted now except for a schooner made fast there and a row of squat little coal barges tied alongside. Often before he had walked here, and had felt himself a part of the life of the river. Its movement, and the movement upon it, were a ceaseless flow of life in which he had a very vital part.

As a small boy he had lived on Riverside Drive, and often then he had descended through the park across the railroad tracks to the shore of the river. He had watched the river life for years, had seen it grow and change and yet remain the same in its flux.

Once, in his eager youth, he had determined to translate that moving beauty into music; but the years had overtaken him, and his passionate love of music had made him a dilettante rather than a composer. He lacked the stability, the precision of thought, of a translator. All that he could do was to feel and hear and love.

The dock was deserted, lifeless; but in the cabin of the farthest barge a kerosene lamp glowed through white curtains. As Wentworth walked toward it, wondering what sort of people might live there, and whether they could love the river as he loved it, he heard a voice raised in song.

It was a girl's voice, and before he realized it he had visualized the girl. As a paleontologist reconstructs a complete skeleton from a few fragmentary bones, so could Wentworth complete the girl from the rich, deep tones of her voice. He knew that she was large, long-limbed, deep-chested. She would have what frailer women called, a bit scornfully, a peasant figure; but he knew that it was a figure glorious in its strength, for only a body and soul of poise and health could sing as she sang.

At first he thought she was singing in German, but as he listened more closely he knew that it was a Scandinavian tongue. Then she would have tawny hair and eyes of a warm blue, and her face would tend to roundness, with generous, full lips and a smile like a mother's.

Suddenly the song rang clearer, for the girl had stepped out upon the deck. He moved to where he could see her as the riding lights of the barge fell athwart her face. His eyes caught a gleaming, silver

something in her hands, and then he heard a splash. She was singing thoughtlessly, wholly without effort, giving her entire attention to the gleaming something in her hand. The searchlight from a battleship in the river revealed it as a dish pan, from which she had just tossed the water from the supper dishes.

A few years before her gesture would have annoyed Wentworth. It might even have disgusted him, for he was a fastidious person. Now, however, it seemed to complete the picture he had formed of her. In the woods he had washed his own dishes and cooked his own meals. A person who could not do such things, and do them well, could probably do nothing else. Certainly that was true of Alicia, whose fair hands had never known dish water, probably not even on the road of the four-a-day, where she was just as selfishly ladylike, no doubt, as she had been in their home.

Wentworth thought of the strange contrast that was life itself—of Alicia, without talent, but with a colossal ego, and of this unknown girl, with a golden voice, but apparently unaware of her possession.

Then, unaccountably, he was afraid that she might be discovered and induced to sing in public. That, it seemed to him, would spoil her greatest charm. Here, on the river of which she was a part, and here only, should she sing—or in the woods of his solitude, or some other far distant place, where she could be herself, singing the simple songs of her own life.

As she went back into the cabin, silent, he sighed deeply and turned away, to walk back to his apartment. He did not know, then, how deeply his chance stroll and the girl's voice had affected him.

IV

THE next day Wentworth found it necessary to look up an old friend, Otto Meyer, impresario and concert manager. Meyer had studied piano with Wentworth in Paris, and their love of music, as well as the limitations that had kept them from being professional musicians, had made them friends.

He was compelled to wait in the outer office until the manager should be free, and as he turned the pages of a musical journal he heard his friend's high-pitched voice raised in anger. Ordinarily Meyer was most tactful and diplomatic, and he had won a reputation for his ability to manage temperaments; but now there was

no doubt at all that he was furious. Wentworth could not help hearing what he said.

"Get out, I tell you!" he squeaked. "And don't ever come back here for anything. I'll have nothing whatever to do with you. I wouldn't if you have discovered another Patti. Now, do you understand me?"

No one hearing him could have mistaken his race. His anger had the passionate, Semitic intensity of a Talmud disputant.

"Calm down, Otto, calm down! Ain't I tellin' you it 'll mean shekels in your pocket? I never knew you to turn down a chance to make money yet," said his caller.

There was something very familiar about that voice, Wentworth thought.

"Get out!" Meyer insisted. "Now is the time you shall see me turn down money. Do you think that I live for money? No, money is nothing to me; and money which should come through you would be thrice cursed!"

The door of the private office was suddenly flung open, and Wentworth, glancing up, saw fat little Otto propelling the other man through it. He panted and heaved, but his anger made him strong. Despite his protests, the unwelcome caller was thrust out.

It was Benny Freeman.

When Freeman saw Wentworth, he gave a wild glance backward, and would have plunged to the comparative safety of escape through an open window had it not been made impossible by the sturdy persistence of Meyer. Wentworth did not move, and Meyer pushed Freeman as far as the door of the outer office. Benny was glad enough to find himself in the hall before Wentworth had decided to leave his chair.

The latter sat unmoved, with a smile somewhat of the same quality as his ironic laugh when he had overheard Alicia accepting a dinner invitation.

When Meyer took him into his own room, he still chose to ignore the incident.

It was not until they had discussed many other things that he came back to it. Then he astonished Meyer by the impersonal calm with which he referred to his former wife.

"I see," he said, "that Alicia's discoverer is still in business."

Meyer was too subtle a judge of concealed emotion to do more than nod. He waited for Wentworth to go on, but the

latter took up his hat and stick and nodded a cheerful *au revoir*.

V

IN spite of his resolution to the contrary, Wentworth found himself more and more often upon the dock where he had first heard the voice of the unknown girl. He found himself there when he had started in a different direction. Without thinking about it at all, he discovered to his surprise that instinctively he was drawn there. The girl never sang, it seemed to him, except when she was washing dishes, and he came to bless that humble task for its power of inspiration.

As the weeks passed, and he continued to return to the dock, keeping a vigil there like a schoolboy before the home of his calf love, it never occurred to him that he might meet the girl. He had seen her several times. Once, in the clear sunlight of afternoon, when a stiff wind swept down the river, he saw her standing on the barge deck and breathing deeply of the clean air. Her hair, as he expected, was tawny, her brow broad, and he guessed that her eyes were blue. She stood there in a light cotton dress, a trifle tight when she breathed and the muscles of her strong young womanhood expanded. She was a glorious figure, and he was conscious of a swifter heartbeat as he watched.

He wondered often, rather mournfully, if she could possibly be married. He had never seen any one else upon the barge, and it remained tied to the dock so long that it was evidently out of use, at least temporarily.

He did not know how deeply he had come to associate the girl with himself and with his own life until one evening when he saw, for the first time, a man busying himself on the deck of the barge. He almost uttered a sob and turned half away. He was recalled to reality by the girl's voice.

"Dad!" she called, in her familiar rich tones. "Supper's ready!"

"Coming, Bea—coming right away," answered the man, as he knotted a rope before going forward into the cabin.

Then Wentworth felt an exultation he had not experienced in years. She was not married, and the man was her father!

As he began to realize that he was falling in love with a girl he did not know, his cynicism returned in its full power. So

long as conscious thought had no part in his regard for the unknown singer, his feet had inevitably taken him to the dock; but now he chided himself for his sentimental madness, and spent his evenings in less simple pleasuring.

If fate, in the incongruous guise of Otto Meyer, had not intervened at this point, it is likely that Wentworth would never have seen the girl again; but one night Otto came to him, the excited bearer of an interesting tale.

"You must come with me at once," he announced, without prelude. "It is most remarkable, and only you will understand it. We must not allow this to be done!"

"What?"

"This Benny Freeman. You know he was in my office. I kicked him out. I would have nothing to do with him—never! He came to me with a wild story—how he had discovered a great singer, a colorature unexcelled—how I should be her manager and his partner, and we should make much money. I would not listen. I threw him out—you yourself have seen. He is no good, you know that, and of singing he knows nothing; but he is lucky, nevertheless, and it is true—he had found such a singer. Come, we will go to her!"

"Wait a minute, Otto, wait a minute! I have no desire to get mixed up with Freeman. My one experience has cost me enough—"

"That is why I have come to you, my friend. You will understand, and you will help me to prevent this—this atrocity!"

"What?" Wentworth repeated.

"This Freeman. Yes, he has found such a singer and such a girl. He has placed her under contract with him—and a terrible contract it is, too. She is poor, her father is poor. All they have—which is not much—will go to him. The girl and her voice—I have heard it, my friend—all will be spoiled by this Freeman, even as Al—"

Meyer's tact stopped him before he had completed the name of Mrs. Wentworth; but there was no need of tact, for Wentworth completed it himself.

"Even as Alicia," he said calmly. "Yes—what then?"

"You must come with me to her; you must help me to dissuade her. Her father—he is a humble man, he does not understand; but they will listen when you speak. Tell me you will come, my friend!"

Wentworth was silent for a moment.

"Otto," he said at last, "I will do anything you ask; but let me assure you first of all that nobody can dissuade any woman in a case like this."

Meyer did not argue the point. Instead, he hustled Wentworth into a coat, hurried out of doors, and hailed a taxi.

It was not until they reached Riverside Drive that Wentworth had any notion of the direction the cab was taking. As they neared Grant's Tomb, he ventured to ask the question.

"You shall see," Meyer vouchsafed, and fell silent.

They turned down from the parkway and drove along the river, past warehouses and packing plants. Before he knew it, Wentworth was standing on the familiar dock and Meyer was dismissing the taxi.

VI

HESITANT and at the same time eager, Wentworth found himself upon the deck of the barge. Meyer was knocking at the door, through the glass of which the light from a kerosene lamp shone; and then the girl of the voice stood there, much as he had seen her before, only at closer range more beautiful than ever.

She welcomed Meyer calmly, but not cordially. Nevertheless, they were invited into the cabin and asked to sit down. By the table her father sat, a tall, fine-looking old man, smoking a strong pipe, which he put down at their entrance.

While Meyer exercised all his tact in leading up to the matter of her contract with Freeman, the girl and her father were silent. They listened attentively, impartially, but with no show of conviction. Wentworth's eyes were steadily upon the girl, but she seemed not at all aware of his presence.

As clearly as he could, restraining his anger—for tact was a better weapon—Meyer set forth the manifest disadvantages of the contract Bea had made. With a less successful restraint of anger he set forth the reputation and character of Freeman; but he did not convince his hearers.

As he concluded, her father replied:

"I'm not gone on this idea of Bea here being a great singer. Nothing ever comes of things like that. People ain't happy with that kind of life, and Bea's happy now—ain't you, girl? But she wants to do it, you understand, and anything she wants to do she can. Anything I got that 'll help

her is hers. So when Mr. Freeman heard her singing and spoke to her about it, and got her all excited, why, I let her sign the paper, and I mean to stick by it. Freeman may be all you say, but you're a competitor of his, ain't you? You'll excuse me, Mr. Meyer, but I don't just understand your interest in this, unless it is to beat your competitor."

Wentworth started to speak, but the old man went on.

"I'm sorry Bea feels like she does about it, but, as I say, I'm going to give her every chance I can. I'll sell this barge and my little place in Jersey, and put it all on Bea. Just the same, you understand, I'm against it. Why, I was reading only to-night, before you came—"

He picked up a newspaper that he had discarded when Meyer knocked on the door.

"Here's a case, for example. I'm not saying anything like this will happen to Bea, and if I can prevent it nothing will; but here's a woman, rich, married well, getting along nice, you might say, and all of a sudden she gets the idea she's a great dancer. She leaves her husband and goes off with another man, who's going to make her a big success. Well, he don't. Instead, she goes broke, he throws her over, and now—she's dead in a little town out West. She killed herself. Her name was Alicia Went—"

Wentworth seized the newspaper, and his eyes fell upon the brief item. A desk man had exerted his wit to make the tragedy of a small soul readable. Meyer put his arm across Wentworth's shoulders as he leaned over with his head in his hands.

"What is it?" asked Bea, speaking for the first time.

Wentworth lifted his eyes to her. He saw her lips parted in sympathy, although she did not understand with what she was sympathizing. She was very tender as she looked at him, and he knew that, strong as she was, she was altogether too womanly to withstand the attacks of the world that was Freeman's.

He began to speak, slowly and calmly. His voice did not rise above a low monotone, but he told them the story of Alicia—and the story of Freeman.

Incidentally, without quite knowing it, he also told them his own heart story, and he revealed the true character of Otto Meyer. No one could have doubted the simple sincerity of what he said; and when

he came, haltingly but unfaltering, to the evening when he had first heard Bea sing, the occasions when he had seen her, least of all could the girl doubt that he was her friend.

As he finished, Bea's father muttered to himself. Bea was looking, with eyes that threatened tears, at Wentworth. She reached out a firm hand—a hand that knew dish water—and laid it over his.

A knock came at the door, and the old bargeman responded. In the light of the kerosene lamp stood the dapper figure of Broadway Benny Freeman.

"Ah, there!" he said heartily. "How's my fair prima donna? And—"

As he came into the room, he stopped. His voice changed from the round tones of the man whose self-confidence is his only asset to a petulant whine.

"Listen, Meyer," he said. "I gave you a chance to get in on this, and you threw me out. Now you got to stay out, see? You don't go butting into my deals and trimming me. I won't stand for it!"

Wentworth stepped between Meyer and Freeman. In his hand was the newspaper, and his finger pointed to the item about Alicia's death. Compelled by his almost hypnotic command, Freeman read it.

"Well," he whined, "that ain't my fault, is it?"

"I am no judge," said Wentworth. "Give me the contract you have drawn with this girl."

Freeman's hand went involuntarily to his inner coat pocket.

"Not on your life!" he cried. "You think I'm going to waste my time like this, and get nothing out of it?"

Wentworth reached over and seized him by the lapels. Freeman turned toward the door, blocked now by the hulking, scowling father of Bea. Wentworth's hand drew forth the contract, which he handed to the girl. Then, suddenly, Freeman was outside, and Bea and Wentworth stood facing each other.

"I'll draw a contract with you, Miss Bea," said Meyer; "one that will be fair, that will provide for your lessons before your debut. A year of study you should have, at least. Yes, we shall make the right arrangements!"

With her eyes looking deep into Wentworth's, Bea replied:

"I don't think I want to sing in public—now."

The Land of Turmoil

A STORY OF TO-DAY IN NEW YORK—ONE MAN'S STRUGGLE
AGAINST THE ORGANIZED POWERS OF EVIL

By William Slavens McNutt

XII

ALTERNATE periods of uneasy sleep and frenzied consciousness wore on Monty Epstein's nerves until, by noon of the day following his capture, he was a quivering mass of pain. Only one thought was alive in his tortured brain—cocaine!

The desire had become an obsession. If he could only get a little of the drug, all his suffering would cease. So long as he was unable to get it, so long he would exist an age in hell during each successive minute of mortal time.

He had forgotten to wind his wrist watch, and it had stopped at half past seven. Was it morning or evening? Monty tried to puzzle this out, and the effort forced him deeper into the pit of hysteria. In his mind there was no ordered recollection of events whereby he might make an approximate estimate of the time since he had first awaked in his strange cell. He did not know whether he had been there several hours or several days.

The maddening fear that he was insane began to assail him. Perhaps all that he saw and felt was part of a hallucination, an experience utterly divorced from reality.

This fear was intensified when, after one of his short, troubled naps, he awoke to find Watson and Sigsbee sitting on camp stools in one corner of the cell. The door through which they had entered, when shut, appeared to be but a seam in the padded canvas covering the wall. They had not been here when Monty dropped off to sleep; they were there when he awoke.

He sat up, shook his head, and tried to rub the two men out of his eyes with his knuckles. When he failed, he crawled

across the floor and felt of Watson's feet and legs.

The man was real—flesh and blood. Convinced of this, Monty began to beg for cocaine. The identity of his captors, the location of his prison, the reason for his detention—the answer to all these questions could wait. The one important question was, could he have cocaine?

Watson swore savagely, and with a sweep of his arm sent him toppling into a corner. "I'll talk to you when I'm ready," he snarled at the cowering gangster. "Until I'm ready, you stay there and shut up, or I'll smash you!"

Monty lay in the corner, whimpering. He saw something that his initial excitement had barred from his attention. It puzzled him. It was a plumber's blow torch—a metal affair about eighteen inches in height, having a small nozzle, from which issued a driven jet of blue flame some three inches in length. Sigsbee, sitting calmly on one of the camp stools, with his elbows on his knees, was holding in his hands an iron stove poker, with its tip bathed in the flame from the torch.

Monty was puzzled, but not more so by the torch and poker than by all else since he had lost consciousness on Forty-Ninth Street. He knew only that he was suffering, and that if he could get some cocaine the sense of pain would be abated.

His wits were so befuddled that he had lost track of the original source of his agony. He had forgotten that he was afraid. Aware that Watson and Sigsbee were talking, he did not hear their words, so intent was he on the problem of devising a plea that would insure him cocaine from these strangers who had power over him. Who were they? Of what sort? What

were their desires and sympathies? What arguments or promises were most likely to move them?

Watson, standing directly above, called him by name twice before Monty heard.

"You can have whatever you want if you'll talk," Watson explained.

Monty blinked.

"Talk!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean by 'talk'?"

"Talk about Arthur Leveridge," Watson explained.

An expression of understanding appeared on Monty's face. He felt like a man who thinks himself lost in a strange country, and then discovers a familiar landmark within hailing distance of home. These two men were detectives! Monty was on familiar ground once more. Courage returned to him.

"Just a couple o' bulls!" he sneered. "What kind of a play are you two fat-heads trying to put over on me, huh? Why, say! You two boys are strangers to me, but I'll tell you this—twenty-four hours after I get out of here I'll have you both broke! Where did you guys grow up that you don't know I rate protection in this town?"

"You don't rate any protection from us. We're not cops."

"Then what's the idea?"

"The idea is that you're going to tell us all you know about Leveridge and his gang. Now, wait. From where you are now no one could hear you if you yelled at the top of your lungs twenty-four hours a day for the next year. None of your gang knows where you are, and they have no chance of tracing you. You belong to us here, and we can do just exactly as we damn please with you. If you'll talk, we'll give you everything to make you comfortable until we get ready to turn you loose. If you don't—"

"What's the good? You can't get nothin' out o' me that 'll hold in a court o' law. Nothin' that I'd say 'd be any use to you."

"Get that court of law thing out of your head," Watson advised. "We don't want evidence—we want information."

Monty shook his head.

"I don't know what your game is, but you can't make me squeal."

"Oh, yes, we can," Watson contradicted him. "You've heard of the third degree? Yes? Well, we're going to give you the three hundred and thirty-third kind. The

cops may go pretty strong when they give it, but their style is cramped. They have to account for the body; we don't. If you should unexpectedly prove stubborn enough to make us go all the way with this thing, we could take our time in disposing of what might be left of you without the slightest risk. No one knows we brought you here, and no one can make it uncomfortable for us if you never leave here."

"You can't bluff me!" Monty insisted.

"We're not going to bluff you—we're going to force you," Watson corrected him. "You know how to deal with the law and beat it a good deal of the time; but you have no way of dealing with us. I don't suppose you ever read of the Spanish Inquisition; but if you prove to be stubborn, you'll learn more of it than any student knows. You're going to talk, Epstein, or we're going to just gradually burn you up with hot iron!"

"A-a-ah! What do you think I am? You can't kid me into that stuff."

"You and your sort have been shooting people in the back for a good many years," Watson went on. "You got by pretty well, because the law is hampered to a certain extent in dealing with thieves and murderers who are just a little clever and utterly ruthless. Before now, whenever you got into trouble, you have had lawyers, money, influence, legal technicalities, all working for you. Now you haven't anything at all working for you. You're just a little fellow in an awfully bad hole, and the only way you can get out is to talk!"

"This thing's hot," Sigsbee casually observed, showing the poker, its tip a glowing lemon color.

"All right! Let me have it. You hold it, and I'll do the work," said Watson.

Monty made no attempt to struggle when Sigsbee jerked him to his feet, twisted his arm up behind his back, and held him in a grip whereby his arm could be broken with a slight twist. Watson approached, holding the poker with the white-hot tip in one hand. He raised it, held it for a moment aimed at Monty's left eye, with the tip less than a foot from the prisoner's face, and then lowered it with an exclamation of disgust.

"Damn! We forgot to bring up that bandage and the medicated cotton. It's on the table in the front room."

"Never mind the bandage," Sigsbee urged. "Go ahead!"

Watson hesitated, frowning.

"His eye will be a terrible mess," he objected.

"What do we care? Go ahead!"

Still Watson hesitated, troubled. Suddenly his face cleared.

"I'll use my handkerchief until you can get the bandage. All right?"

"Shoot!"

Monty Epstein had not believed that the two men meant to carry out their threats. Watson's explanation of what they meant to do to him had failed to carry conviction. In spite of his shaken nerves, he was braced to stand firm, no matter how close the white hot iron came. He felt sure that the action was a bluff. Only the actual destroying touch of the metal on his eyeball could have convinced him that his captor meant business.

But the casual hint about the forgotten bandage slipped doubt past his defenses. He would have believed nothing evidently done or said to influence him directly; but that talk about the bandage! He still did not believe that his captors would carry out their threat, but also he did not absolutely disbelieve it.

The glowing point of the poker was not more than an inch from his eye. He fought for courage. They were simply trying to frighten him. It was a child's trick! They were playing with him; but that talk about the bandages! Perhaps if his nerves had not been so ragged—if the *yen* for the drug had not worn him down—

Monty broke and screamed. He would talk! He would tell them anything they wanted to know—anything!

Two hours later Monty Epstein lay in his padded cell, peacefully asleep. Downstairs Watson and Sigsbee, their heads together, were poring over their copious notes of the prisoner's revelation.

Sigsbee sat back in his chair and studied Watson, a troubled expression on his face.

"I say, Watson, you wouldn't really have done it, would you?"

"I had a friend once, a gambler in the East," Watson replied thoughtfully, and with seeming irrelevance. "He taught me the trick of successful bluffing. It's this—first convince yourself that you're not bluffing. Be absolutely earnest in your threat, believe that you'll keep your promise, and nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of a thousand you won't have to go through with

it. I've tried it scores of times, and it has always worked. I haven't yet come to the thousandth case."

XIII

An immigrant with blue eyes and reddish hair had passed the final examination at Ellis Island. In company with a crowd of equally fortunate men and women, he was herded the length of a long, low, narrow brick building by impatient attendants. Soon he found himself ordered out through a wide exit into the open, and upon a sloping runway that led to the ferry for the Battery.

The man had the appearance of a fairly well-to-do Italian of the merchant or petty land-holding class. He carried in his right hand a large red leather suit case, on one side of which was painted in letters, two inches high, "Antonio Addonizio."

That name was the one which appeared on the man's passport. It was not his rightful one, nor was he a native of Italy. Names and passports to fit are not difficult to come by, when sought by clever men with criminal connections.

The lower deck of the ferry was crowded with the newly arrived immigrants and their friends—a noisy, colorful, odoriferous crowd, highly emotionalized, and given to gesticulatory expression. The man known as Antonio Addonizio worked his way through the mass of men and women, and out to the bow of the vessel. He stood there for a minute or more, gazing at the skyscrapers of lower New York.

A well-dressed, youngish man, evidently an American, stepped beside him.

"Do you speak English?" the American asked.

"Very well," the immigrant replied.

"You have come far?"

The immigrant nodded.

"I must go farther," he said.

The American took his watch from his pocket and shook it.

"My watch has stopped," he said. "Have you the time?"

The immigrant lowered his voice.

"It is forty-six miles."

"What temperature?"

"Slender."

The American raised his voice, so that any one standing near could clearly hear.

"Come up on the upper deck. You can see more from there, and I'll point out some of the interesting things."

The American and the immigrant found themselves the only passengers in evidence on the upper deck. Drawing the immigrant close to the cabin, the American pointed toward New York with an outstretched hand, and appeared to be explaining the geography of the city. While giving this appearance, he was whispering in the immigrant's ear:

"We think the police have been tipped. If so, they'll know that you are to be identified by that suit case with your name painted on it. I don't know if they're on the boat. I think not. I think they're waiting at the Battery. You must get rid of that suit case. No one is watching now. Set it down on deck and slip it back under this seat as far as it will go. Then we'll go down on the lower deck again. We'll stand in the bow and be the first ashore. We may get through all right yet."

The immigrant set down the suit case and, with his heel, shoved it back under the bench built against the wall of the deck house. After a few minutes, when the ferry had kicked its way out into the harbor and was forging toward the Battery, the immigrant and the American returned to the lower deck and took their places in the bow of the boat. When the ferry docked, they were among the first to leave it. They hurried past the customhouse inspectors and out to the sidewalk, passing between the pressing banks of eager people expecting relatives—banks of people held in place only by the utmost efforts of a number of husky policemen.

Disengaged from the crowd, they crossed the street and entered a five-passenger touring car. The American guided the car uptown, through Central Park, out by St. Nicholas Avenue and upper Broadway to Yonkers, and thence northward by the highroad along the Hudson River. There was little conversation between the two men.

As the car cleared Hastings-on-the-Hudson, the American gave a great sigh of relief.

"I think we're clear now," he said. "It was a close thing!"

The immigrant smiled.

"I'm not unaccustomed to close things. What happened?"

"One of our men must have squealed. We don't know definitely yet. All we're sure of is that the police were tipped off that you were arriving, or were going to be tipped off. I haven't the details. Our or-

ganization is a large one, as you probably know."

The immigrant nodded and laughed.

"The American police would give a little something to get hold of me. That would be something for them to boast about, eh—to take the man who has eluded the police and the military of all Europe?"

"You've never been taken?"

"Never! I had a narrow escape after that last try for the Spanish king. The first bomb went off prematurely, and I got a nasty slug in my side. I was unable to leave my bed for several weeks, and the hounds were sniffing close. They very nearly had me that time. But what of this new man—this leader who has come up over here so recently? Tell me of him."

The driver of the car shrugged and shook his head.

"How much do you know of him?"

"Nothing at all, except that I have assurance that he is a powerful person and a unique addition to our ranks. The rest is mystery."

"You'll meet him soon," said the driver of the car. "I'd rather not risk an indiscreet description."

"Ah! A high-handed individual, eh? One who deals severely with those who risk—indiscreet descriptions?"

"Precisely!"

"A man after my own heart! I have known that I should find him to my liking. One senses such things. When I made inquiries in Europe, and was unable to discover anything of this man except his vague reputation, I knew that one day I would work with him. I smelled genius, because he was operating actively, and yet even I was unable to learn anything of him. Such a man lives long and does much!"

At length the driver swung the car from the main highway into a narrow side road that ran under an arch of stone and iron and wound through a thick wood. After a run of about a quarter of a mile it came out on a driveway before a rather imposing three-story frame house, and stopped before the veranda steps.

"Here we are," said the driver.

The passenger started to get out. He stood up in the car and leaned over, facing outward, to turn the catch and open the door preparatory to stepping down. As he leaned over, the driver drew a short-barreled gun from his coat pocket, gripped it by the barrel, and, half rising from his

seat, struck his passenger smartly on the back of the head with the stock.

The stricken man went limp and slipped forward. The driver caught him just as he was about to tumble out of the car. He eased the unconscious man to the ground, and laid him on the grass. Whistling a popular tune, and going about his work as casually and with as little interest as if he were shaving, or performing any other routine task requiring no thought, he took from the pocket in one of the doors a small bottle not quite full of chloroform, anointed his handkerchief with it, and held the saturated fabric to the unconscious man's nose for a little time.

Then, very carefully, he put the bottle back into the pocket, spread his handkerchief on the mud guard to dry, and, hoisting the drugged man's torso up under one arm, dragged him into the house. He lugged his burden up one flight of stairs and down a narrow, dark hall. Before a narrow door he eased the man to the floor, took a key from his pocket, unlocked and opened the door.

The room was bare of furniture. Ceiling, floor, and walls were covered with padded canvas. Nelson J. Sigsbee lugged the unconscious man inside, stepped out into the hall, and locked the door on him.

"It was built for violent and insane patients," he said to himself with a smile. "I think the gentleman inside will qualify as an occupant on both counts when he comes to life and finds himself laid by the heels!"

He stopped at the next door down the hall and looked into a room identical with the one in which he had just left the drugged man. Monty Epstein was asleep on the floor.

"Sleep, pretty creature!" Sigsbee said, as he closed and locked the door. "Your information was letter perfect." He laughed to himself and shrugged. "Have to begin sleeping the beggars two in a room, if we go on at this rate!"

A moment after the man who had passed as Antonio Addonizio had dropped his suit case and fled to the lower deck of the ferry, Bob Watson stepped out from the glassed-in cabin and took possession of the identifying bit of baggage. He was dressed in coarse, heavy shoes, corduroy trousers, a gray flannel shirt, and a worn felt hat with a high crown and a narrow brim. His

coat, a limp grayish thing, he carried over his arm.

He sat down by the abandoned suit case and waited. Not until he had seen Sigsbee and his dupe leave the boat did he descend to the lower deck. He was one of the last to go ashore. The suit case he carried in his right hand, with the side on which the name was so conspicuously painted away from his body.

When he passed out to the street, the crowds on either side of the lane that the police kept open were beginning to disperse, to break up into groups of reunited families, laughing, crying, kissing, chattering unheeded questions and unheard answers. Only a few remained—men and women with white, fear-stricken faces, peering into the dark corridor from which others had come, as if they hoped to materialize the missing loved ones by the intensity of their gaze.

Watson walked half a block east. His movements were apparently aimless. He loitered along, staring up at the skyscrapers on lower Broadway, as if absorbed in amazement and moving mechanically, without purpose.

A well-dressed, youngish man, evidently an American, stepped beside him.

"Do you speak English?" the American asked.

"Very well," Watson replied.

"You have come far?"

Watson nodded. "I must go farther," he said.

The American took his watch from his pocket and shook it.

"My watch has stopped," he said, "Have you got the time?"

Watson lowered his voice.

"It's forty-six miles."

"What temperature?"

"Slender."

"All is right!" The American hailed a passing taxi. "Henderson's Garage, on West Fifty-Sixth," he directed the driver.

He motioned Watson into the cab and took a seat beside him.

"We'll get a car up at the garage and shoot you right out to the big boss," he said. "Them's the orders."

"I'll be glad to meet him."

Watson's guide laughed.

"I'd be glad to meet him myself. It's a funny stunt, doing business for a guy you never saw, and don't even know by name."

"Is he as secretive as all that?"

"I'll say so! I don't know who he is, and I don't know anybody who does know."

"How do you get orders from him?"

"Oh, I suppose one or two of the boys upstairs do business direct. But, say, I'm running off at the mouth. Just forget this stuff, will you? It isn't supposed to be healthy to talk about the big boss unless you got a good reason."

"Don't worry—I'll not mention that you said anything."

"Atta boy!" The young fellow studied Watson curiously for a time. "I never did business with any of you boys from the other side before," he added.

"No?"

"I wasn't supposed to meet you to-day. I was called up for it just at the last minute. I was scared I'd forget some of that nutty stuff we had to say to each other, and ball the thing up. You came pretty near not being met at all."

"That so?"

"Yeh! The guy that was supposed to look out for you went on a bat, I guess. Puts him in a tough spot. He's been a good man, but he's been sniffing the snow for a year or so, and I guess it's got him. He stood pretty well with some of the boys upstairs, but he'll probably get the big gate for slipping up on this piece of work. Too bad! Poor Monty!"

"What's his name?"

"Monty—Monty Epstein. Not a bad guy when he was going good. It's tough!"

XIV

WATSON'S guide seemed to be well acquainted at the garage on Fifty-Sixth Street. A high-powered roadster was given him without any question. He drove rapidly northward through upper Broadway to Yonkers, and thence on along the river road through Tarrytown. A few miles above Tarrytown he drew up at an inn. A small touring car was standing in the parking space, the chauffeur lounging at the wheel, idly smoking a cigarette.

As he drove up to the front of the inn, Watson's guide indicated the loafing chauffeur in the small car.

"When I stop, I'll get right out and go inside," he explained. "You get out after me, walk over to that car, and say 'Hello, Jack,' and get in. After that, do as he tells you."

"You're not coming with me?"

"This is as far as I ever go. What happens beyond here I don't know. If I tried to find out, I expect I'd soon be telling the worms to lay over and let me have some room, so's I could sleep. I'm wise! What I don't know don't get me into trouble. Good luck!"

The man brought the car to a standstill, stepped out, and entered the inn without another word or a backward look. Watson clambered out, crossed the drive to the car indicated, and hailed the chauffeur.

"Hello, Jack!"

The chauffeur granted him a casual glance and a surly nod. Watson opened the door, stepped into the rear of the vehicle, and sat down.

The driver started the car immediately. He drove northward for several miles along the river road, and then turned to the east on a narrow, winding dirt road arched with the interlocking branches of the tall elms that lined the way on either side.

In the course of the first half mile along this side road they passed two old farmhouses, tenantless and dilapidated, and one large estate. All that could be seen of the estate from the road was several hundred yards of stone fence six or eight feet in height, and midway in this a high, close-barred iron gate. Through the gate a passer-by could see a short stretch of driveway, which curved sharply to the left thirty yards inside the grounds, and was further hidden from sight by a thick growth of trees and underbrush.

About one hundred yards beyond the gate, the branches from a long, low maple limb hung down in the middle of the road, below the top of the car.

"Look out!" the driver called sharply, as the iron support of the top struck the slender branches.

Watson had just time to throw up his arm and ward off the sharp flick of a leafy switch, as it snapped into the back of the car after being bent into a bow by the swift pressure of the iron rod.

"Somebody get their eye put out there some time!" the driver grumbled. "That limb ought to be cut!"

About a quarter of a mile beyond the end of this estate, at a spot where the narrow road was bordered on one side by high swamp grass and thick willow growth, and on the other by a steep, heavily wooded hill, the driver stopped the car and looked back at his passenger for the first time.

"I'll have to blindfold you and tie you up before we go any farther," he said.

"Why so?" Watson asked, with an assumption of indignation. "Am I not to be trusted?"

"Don't know nothin' about that. Them's my orders."

"Whose orders?"

"You know damned well whose orders, or you wouldn't be here!"

The man fished in a pocket on the door and brought forth a length of soft rope, a strip of black cloth ten inches wide and several feet long, and a black sack of the same material, about eighteen inches long and a foot wide. He opened the door then, and stepped out into the road.

"Just stand up in the car with your back to me, and put your hands behind you, so's I can get at 'em," he suggested.

"Suppose some one should come along?" Watson objected. "Look funny, wouldn't it, to see me standing up in plain sight and you tying my hands?"

"No one's going to come along," the driver assured him with grim confidence. "Anybody who came on this road at either end since we drove into it wouldn't get two hundred yards without bein' stopped. Don't worry about anybody comin' along!"

For a moment Watson hesitated. To face an unknown danger with his eyes open and his arms free was one thing; to meet the same threat blindfolded and bound was quite another. Since first talking with Sigsbee, he had been increasingly conscious of the astonishing scope of the evil thing against which he had pitted himself. From the time he had been accosted outside the ferry landing at the Battery, it had seemed to him as if he could actually feel on his flesh the touch of the thing's tentacles, multiplying and taking hold more and more firmly as he was guided along toward its mysterious head.

To subject himself to the mercy of such an organization blindfolded and bound! The thought of it touched his heart with the chill of frantic terror. The impulse to leap from the car, batter down the driver, and flee, flamed in him as sudden and powerful as a passion.

"Hurry up!" the driver urged impatiently. "We'll never get there!"

The phrase gave Watson the encouragement to endurance that he needed. Never get there! He felt that he never would get there if he faltered now—would never

get to the fountainhead of the evil power which in some manner touched the girl he loved.

Somewhere just ahead of him lay a clew to the mystery—the knowledge that might enable him to deliver Leveridge and his associates to the law, labeled and identified in such manner that the law could destroy both the man and his influence. If he yielded to the impulse that bade him flee, he might never get there—might never again be in a position to operate successfully against the thing which he had solemnly dedicated himself to destroy.

Not the ghost of an expression revealed on his face any slight hint of the turbulent emotional battle being fought in his heart between the instinct of self-preservation and the sentiment of self-sacrifice. There was no smile, no flush, no flash of the eye, to herald the victory when courage won over cowardice. The driver, watching him closely, saw only that he evinced a normal reluctance to submit to the discomfort of bonds and a blindfold.

Watson stood up in the tonneau with his back to the driver and held his hands behind him, his wrists crossed.

"Seems mighty silly to me," he grumbled; "but if it's part of the regular game, go ahead!"

The chauffeur tied his hands, bandaged his eyes with the black cloth, and then drew the small sack down over his head. When the operation was complete, Watson sank back on the seat, blind and helpless.

The car started and moved ahead slowly for about twenty minutes. Watson kept track of the time as accurately as possible by counting the seconds to sixty, and keeping track of the minutes thus told. He estimated that the car was traveling approximately fifteen miles an hour.

Watson had just counted off his eighteenth minute when he felt the car swerve suddenly. At the same instant the chauffeur called sharply:

"Look out!"

Watson instinctively ducked and threw up his arm. He felt a stinging slap on his wrist, as if it had been smartly struck with a slender whip.

A possible explanation flashed through Watson's mind, and simultaneously he sensed the wisdom of pretending not to have thought of it.

"What's the matter?" he called. "What did you yell at me to look out for?"

The driver did not answer at once.

"Bad bump in the road," he said, after a moment's silence. "I was afraid I'd hit it and give you a shaking up."

The car traveled, according to the blindfolded passenger's calculation, a minute and a half longer, and came to a stop. Watson listened intently, and was satisfied that he heard an iron hinge complaining as it moved.

The car was stationary for about thirty seconds. When it moved forward again, Watson relaxed and sat limp, passive. Within a few seconds he felt his body inclining sharply to the right. A glow of satisfaction warmed him. He was as sure of his location as if the blindfold had never been applied to his eyes.

The first hint of the truth had come to him with the chauffeur's warning cry and the flick on his wrist, as if it had been struck with a slender whip. The low-hanging maple branch! Driven by a round-about course for four or five miles and brought back almost to the spot where he had been blindfolded! That was his sudden hunch.

The tone of the driver's voice, when he explained that he had been afraid of hitting a bump in the road, added its bit of confirmation to the hunch. The man had instinctively cried out a warning and instantly regretted it, fearing that his passenger might suspect what had happened. When Watson had asked the cause of the warning cry, apparently having no idea what had prompted it, the driver had been relieved, and the feeling had been plainly audible in his tone.

Then the car had stopped after traveling about a minute and a half from the spot where the driver had cried his warning. Watson recalled, with a thrill of triumph, that it would take just about that long to drive from the place on the road where the maple limb hung low to the iron gate in the high stone wall of the estate. He was almost sure, then, that he heard the grating sound of iron moving against iron, as the gate was swung open. He recalled that just inside the grounds the driveway curved sharply to the left, and decided that if he sensed the car turning to the left a few seconds after starting, he could be practically sure of himself. The car did swing sharply to the left, as the inclination to the right of his relaxed body proved.

Watson was satisfied. Blindfolded and

in an unfamiliar bit of country, he was nevertheless certain that he knew just where he was—that he was on the grounds of the estate that he had passed just before his eyes were bandaged—the estate shut off from the road by a high stone wall and a close-barred iron gate.

The belief that he had been able to determine his location, able to be other than utterly helpless, in spite of the handicap of blindness that had been forced upon him, gave him added courage and a sense of refreshed power. He was able to free himself completely from the fear that had laid hold on him when he was ordered to submit to the blindfold and the bonds.

After about five minutes, the car stopped again. Watson felt a hand on his arm and heard the driver's voice:

"Come on! Careful! Look out for the step."

Half guided, half feeling his way with his feet, Watson descended from the car. From the sound and feel of the footing, he knew that he was standing on a graveled driveway or path.

He felt the pressure of a strange hand on his arm, and heard an unfamiliar voice say:

"This way, sir. Careful, sir!"

Fifteen paces, and again the voice of his new guide in warning:

"Careful, sir! Step up."

Watson counted eight steps up. They were of stone. Then six paces on a wooden floor, a momentary halt, a doorstep, a carpet under foot.

The picture was clear in Watson's mind. The house stood about a quarter of a mile back from the road. The car had stopped on a graveled drive. The chauffeur had helped Watson out and turned him over to another man—evidently, by his speech, a well-trained house servant. The servant had led him to the stone veranda steps, of which there were eight, then across a hardwood veranda floor, which was six paces wide, and into the house.

Eight paces then to the stairs, and up fifteen steps to the second floor. Ten paces along a hallway, and into a room. A halt, and the feel of a chair pressed against his legs from behind.

"The chair's in place for you, sir, if you'll sit down," the servant said.

Watson relaxed, and found himself in the comfortable embrace of a large padded leather chair.

"The master's not in yet, sir," the serv-

ant explained. "It may be an hour, perhaps longer, before he arrives. I'm sorry, sir, but I have no orders to untie your hands or take the blindfold from your eyes. You'll have to make the best of it, sir, until the master comes."

Then silence and darkness, and the chilling doubts that are ever bred of these two children of fear. Watson found himself imagining that persons in a near-by room were sitting in judgment on him; that he was being watched by sinister eyes; that there were a number of silent, angry men standing close beside him, and even that one of them was thrusting a knife at his throat.

He throttled his runaway fancy with a strong grip of will. To aid in keeping his mind away from such fearful thoughts, he began counting the seconds again and keeping track of the minutes.

An hour passed. His bound arms were aching badly and his body was weary from the strained position in which he was obliged to sit.

Two hours! It had been a little after six in the afternoon when he was blindfolded on the road. It must be quite dark by now.

A footstep in the room. The servant's voice.

"The master is here, sir. He asked me to say that he is sorry you should have been inconvenienced. If you'll stand, so that I can get at the cord on your wrists—"

A few moments later Watson stood free of bonds and blindfold. He found himself in a small, dark-toned room, evidently a man's study. The servant proved to be a tall, bald-headed, solemn man of powerful build. He stood by an open door to usher Watson into the adjoining room.

"The master is in here, sir," he said.

Watson took a deep breath, squared his shoulders, and stepped forward to meet the head of the evil thing he had sworn to slay.

XV.

It was a long room with a high, beamed ceiling. On one side of the room were four large windows, at either end a door, and on the side opposite the row of large windows two doors, the one through which Watson entered and another close beside it.

In the center of the room stood a long, flat-topped mahogany desk. On the opposite side of the desk, in a high-backed chair, sat a man wearing a small black silk mask.

He was a little more than average size, and yet one's first impression of him was that of a small man. It may be that for this his hands were partially responsible. They were the smooth, white hands of a slender young woman. They were the sort of hands that some high caste Chinamen have. Long and slender, they were nevertheless well fleshed, giving no suggestion of being bony. They were beautiful hands, and yet repulsive. They were ophidian in character—sinuous, cold, and menacing. If they brought to one's mind the vision of a beautiful deadly snake, they also suggested some sort of lovely fungus growth.

The masked man rose as Watson entered the room.

"I owe you a thousand apologies," he said, bowing slightly. His voice was low and musical. There was in it a silky quality. "I was unavoidably delayed, and I stupidly neglected to give Lewis direct orders to loose your hands and remove the blindfold after you arrived."

Watson took the slender hand extended across the table. A shock of surprise tingled through him at the strength of its grip.

The masked man motioned Watson to a chair.

"You must have been fearfully uncomfortable," he went on.

"I wouldn't voluntarily have myself trussed up in that way," Watson admitted.

"But you're here," the man said exultantly. "That's the great thing—you're here! And now for some marvelous achievements, eh?"

"I hope so," Watson said.

He was fighting for time and information. From Epstein he had learned that a celebrated criminal was coming from Naples as an Italian immigrant, under the name of Antonio Addonizio. He had ascertained how he was to be met, and that he was to be taken immediately to meet the mysterious person who was behind and above Leveridge, and whose word was law. Epstein had said that the expected immigrant, so far as he knew, was new to America; that no one in the gang knew him by sight, and that he was coming at the invitation of the mysterious figure who had risen to a position of such power that even Leveridge ran to do his bidding.

With that slight knowledge to aid him in his impersonation, Watson faced the masked man and waited for a clew to work on further.

"Ah, but you must be sure!" the masked man cried reprovingly. "Hope! A silly sentiment for the sustenance of weaklings! Such men as you and I are above that sort of nursery nonsense. We do not hope; we compel, you and I! We dare all and do all, and never a stumble till we trip on the brink of the great pit that the devil digs for the best of us, and then one plunge and oblivion, eh? We cannot whip death, you and I, but we can be certain of every victory right on up to the inevitable final defeat!"

A madman! That was Watson's thought. He recalled Sigsbee's declaration that the power behind the inside throne of the organization expressed both genius and insanity.

A madman who evidently expected his mood to be matched by the individual he believed Watson to be! Watson, when he replied, strove for an approximation to the man's style of expression.

"We speak a language so few understand that my tongue has grown clumsy explaining meanings to dull ears. Because of this, I have formed the habit of using the word some stupid companion expects to hear, rather than one truly expressive of my thought. For the moment I forgot that I spoke to a man who hears. I apologize for the phrase."

The masked man clapped his hands in approval. His lips parted in a smile of pleasure.

"Capital! Splendid! My dear Bergstrom, I foresee that we are to like each other. I was sure of it when I sent for you. All that I had heard of you and your work made me long to know you. 'Here,' I said to myself, 'is a man of complete intelligence, not only lacking any taint of that absurd superstition men call conscience, but having also the wit and the heart to understand and laugh at the great joke.' Is it not side-splitting, this comedy, when one is able to behold it through the clear eye of the intelligent criminal?"

Bergstrom! So that was the name of the man he was impersonating!

How much did the masked man know about Bergstrom? Watson felt like a blind man walking on a glacier, imagining a deep crevasse always just one step in front, and yet compelled to keep moving. Any word he spoke might be fatal.

"Only the criminal sees," he ventured.

"But so few criminals *do* see," the

masked man argued. "Most of them are as blind to the wonderful humor of it all as the most stupid slave of law, convention, and virtue. They think of crime only as one means of earning a living. And how many are hypocrites! They have standards of morality, they ape or counterfeit the superstitious folly of the sheep on whom they prey. They hunt in the guise of wolves, but they have the pale hearts and the putty minds of their victims. I verily believe, my dear Bergstrom, that the real criminal is the rarest, and, in consequence, the loveliest, of mortals!"

"In all my experience I have known but one real criminal," Watson said.

The masked man leaned forward eagerly.

"And he is—"

"Myself."

"Splendid! I knew you were a man to my liking! Tell me, are you sincere in your devotion to the political theories you are struggling to turn into facts?"

Watson hesitated for only a moment, but that tiny span of time seemed to him as an hour to a waiting lover. Just what were the political theories of the man he was impersonating? To what extent was his mysterious questioner interested in those theories, whatever they were? Would an affirmation of sincerity establish him more firmly in the masked man's confidence, or lead to further argument that might prove fatal?

Watson took his cue from the man's tone.

"Sincere!" he exclaimed mockingly. "Devotion! Are we children prattling of fairy tales, or men who need not pretend? I am sincere in my devotion to my personal pleasure, and I expend effort only in struggling to gratify my personal desires."

It was the right note. The masked man nodded approval and chuckled delightedly.

"I knew you were not a stupid servant of a cause! I was sure of it. When Degautrie first told me of you, of the way you mystified the police of all Europe, combining the work of an apparent political fanatic with the business of a shrewd, commercial criminal, I knew that you were an artist. By the way, did Degautrie go on to Barcelona?"

Degautrie! Who and what was Degautrie? Watson sought refuge in a pretense of caution.

"I never make casual conversation of the movements of my friends," he said. "No

wall with ears will ever absorb information from my lips that might lead to the undoing of a comrade."

"You do not trust me?"

Watson answered the question with a question.

"Is it absolutely necessary for you to know whether Degautrie did or did not go on to Barcelona?"

"No. He told me he expected to go there after seeing you in Vienna, and I wondered if—"

"I thought so," Watson interrupted. "It was an idle question. You ask me if I trust you. I answer that unless there be legitimate cause, I do not trust my own brain with conscious thought of the whereabouts of men and women of interest to the police."

The masked man nodded agreement.

"Quite right, of course. I apologize for an impertinent curiosity. But now to our own affairs. How much did Degautrie tell you of me?"

"Suppose we assume that he told me practically nothing," Watson suggested. "Then you'll be sure to correct any erroneous impressions he may have unintentionally given me."

"Good! I will also assume that you know of me in a general way, and know that I have a dominant influence in the American underworld, although not more than five men who know my identity also know my connection with crime. A number of stupid, greedy men—petty crooks—have attempted to discover my identity. All who made the attempt have been turned back to the dull dust, from which, I must say, they had never progressed far. I saw to it that news of the fate of these men was properly distributed. Attempting to discover my identity is an activity in which well informed American criminals no longer indulge."

"Terror, properly handled, is an excellent defensive weapon," Watson said.

"Your understanding of the fact that it must be properly handled further confirms my judgment of you," the masked man declared. "So many people confuse brutality with terror, and imagine that mere stupid violence is the equivalent of fear intelligently developed in men's minds. Human beings are more illogical and unreasoning than sheep. They bear more easily a certainty of death than the thought of possible escape from it, and are more prone

to suffer a nervous collapse when offered a slight hope than when facing absolute despair. It is a matter of recent record that cowards kill themselves to avoid being drafted into military service. They were so afraid of death on the battlefield that they sought death to avoid it. Stories and news reports had so dramatized the terror of war that they committed suicide rather than face it. They inflicted on themselves the worst penalty that war could impose, rather than go to war and take the chance of escaping any penalty. To make terror truly effective, one must dramatize it."

The masked man took a cigar from a small humidor on a stand at his side, and offered one to Watson, who declined it. After carefully lighting his own selection he continued:

"You, of course, will soon know just who and what I am. I plan for you and myself to work together too intimately to permit my withholding my identity."

"We can accomplish much together," Watson hazarded.

"I'm sure of it. Combined, our minds, temperaments, abilities, and resources should make the perfect criminal. Degautrie, I know, did not give you my name, because he does not know it; but doubtless he told you something of my position?"

"We are assuming that he told me practically nothing."

"Ah, quite right! I must tell you, then, that I am unique, at least in the criminal history of modern times. Never before—at least not within the last few hundred years—has a man of my experience, intelligence, and position been directly connected with the criminal world."

"What an advantage that gives you!" Watson exclaimed.

The masked man leaned forward eagerly.

"Do you begin to see? Evidence that would be strong enough to convict the average criminal is not sufficient even to direct suspicion my way. It's absurd to imagine that I am in any way connected with the criminal world. Why should I be? Until recently I was president of one of the largest and oldest financial houses in the United States. When I retired, I explained through the press that I had more money than I needed, that I felt I had rendered the service duty demanded of me, and that I intended to devote the rest of my life to collecting art objects and playing around the world on my yacht.

How can any police officer suspect me? I have more money than I can spend, so why should I deal with thieves. I rank high in the established order, financial and social, so why should I act as the accomplice of those who work to destroy that order by violent revolution? Suppose that a clever policeman follows a clew to my very door. Does he knock and enter? If so, it is only to warn me that there must be a criminal among the servants or guests in my house, of whose identity, of course, I am unaware. Suppose that robbery and murder are committed, and that by some unlucky chance I am discovered on the scene, standing beside the victim with a smoking revolver or a blood-wet knife in my hand. Am I suspected of having committed the murder? Naturally not. A man of my sort can be suspected of lethal violence only in a crime of passion. Murder a man in the course of a common robbery? The idea is absurd, of course. In case I were found in such a position, I should be asked how I came there, and my explanation would be accepted without question. I should tell what I knew of the affair—how I heard a cry, stepped in just in time to see a man vanish through the window, and then picked up the knife or revolver. Whatever reasonably plausible tale first occurred to me would be accepted without question. Some skeptical officer might attempt to find a woman in the case, and thus establish a motive; but failing in that, he would never think of going further in his attempt to connect me with the crime.

"Or, let us suppose that there occurs what our newspapers refer to as a bomb outrage. We will say that a number of men high in the financial world are killed. It is evidently the work of anarchists or devotees of some other form of revolutionary fanaticism. We will suppose, further, that you, my dear Bergstrom, are the active author of the outrage, and that the police discover this to be the fact. In tracing you, we will suppose that they find you have been a recent visitor here, a guest in my home, even one of my intimate friends. Am I then suspected of complicity? Certainly not! I am congratulated on my narrow escape. It is explained to me that I have unwittingly been entertaining a notorious European anarchist and all-round criminal, one known as Lattig Bergstrom, who was undoubtedly planning my destruction. I explain that he passed himself off

on me as this or that person, thank the police for their service, and the incident is closed. Do you see, my dear Bergstrom, how secure my position has been?"

"I understand what misleads the police," Watson said. "They know you have wealth and position, and that in consequence neither necessity nor impulse drives you to the commission of mercenary or political crimes. This question naturally occurs, then, even to me—why do you commit such crimes?"

XVI

THE masked man did not answer for a little time. Watson could sense disapproval, disappointment, in his silence.

"I believed that you would understand," the strange criminal said at last. "From what I knew of your work in Europe, from what I've seen of you and heard you say in the last few minutes, I was certain that you would understand."

"I did not say that I had no answer to the question that is in my mind," Watson reminded him. "A motive for your actions is not inconceivable to me. If I were a man in your position, I think I would do as you have done. I am wondering only if the motive which prompts you is the same that would move me to similar action, were I in your position."

The masked man nodded.

"I see your point," he said slowly. "But tell me—you can understand why I should be a criminal, can you not?"

His voice was eager, pleading. There was audible in it a quality almost pathetic.

"Offhand, I can think of half a dozen perfectly legitimate reasons why you should be a criminal," Watson assured him. "If I am not certain just why you have become one, it is because I can understand so many reasons why you should."

"I suppose there are a number of possible reasons," the masked man said thoughtfully. "In fact, I begin to realize that I have not a single impelling reason, but an impulse created by many reasons. You are right, Bergstrom."

The masked man smiled. The despondent quality was gone from his voice.

"I foresee that you are to be as great a delight to me as I had expected, Bergstrom," he went on. "Even those of us who have discarded the greatest number of human weaknesses still have follies of sentiment clinging to us. I must confess

to having been lonely. Loneliness is not caused by lack of company, but by lack of at least one companion who fully understands one. Since I decided to be completely intelligent and serve no master but my own deepest desires, I have been lonely, Bergstrom—lonely. There has been no one who could understand me.”

“I have had the same feeling,” Watson declared.

“I’m sure you have. Ah, but you and I will be a comfort to each other! I don’t know if you had the same experience, but in my early youth I was a victim of the devil of righteousness. I was more than a casual church member, Bergstrom. I believed devoutly in the Christian’s God, and prayed to Him in all sincerity. In me that superstitious insanity known as conscience was highly developed. As a child, I suffered agonies in return for minor peccadillos—an inconsequential falsehood, disobedience to an order given by my parents or my governess. When I grew to young manhood and sinned, my remorse was not the casual, fleeting emotion of the average youngster. No—I suffered mental and emotional agony to the point of insanity. Then I sinned again and suffered again.

“At last I rebelled. Certain that I would be punished for my acts, I decided nevertheless to gorge myself at the devil’s feast without thought or fear of the consequences. I plunged into dissipation with all the excessive fervor of a man doomed to death snatching at pleasure during the brief period of life remaining to him. As I continued my debauchery, unafraid and unrepentant, the mists of superstition began to fade from about me, and I saw that I had been an ignorant fool, as much the slave of superstition as any devotee of voodoo in the African jungles. I saw that I had been whipped, crushed, mangled by the popular lie which declares that the practice of virtue, kindness, honesty, and charity befit a man for certain desirable rewards in this world and insure him an extension of identity after death and a blissful immortality.

“When I first began to realize how I had been tricked, I was relieved. It felt good to be free from all the old fears and regrets that had poisoned me. For a time I was filled with a great joy; but then anger grew in me. I became enraged at remembrance of the manner in which I had been fooled and made to suffer needlessly. I

felt a deep humiliation to recollect what a gullible victim I had been. Then came a thirst for knowledge of the truth. I knew what the lie was; what was the truth?

“I sought through the philosophies and religions of the world, and one day the truth came to me in a flash. I knew the great lie. I had been fooled by it for years. I knew each and every detail of its complicated falsity. Knowing the lie as I did, I could recognize truth anywhere in the opposite of the lie. There is no hereafter. That is truth, because the great lie maintains that there is a life after death. So all the way through—I had only to reverse the lie to find the truth. Ah, but I revealed in my discovery, I tell you! It was a secret revel. I let no man know my thoughts. I was in my twenty-fifth year then; I am forty-nine now. During that span of twenty-four years I have kept my place in society as a complete hypocrite. Ah, but it has been amusing! To have the intimate friendship and confidence of men for years, knowing all the while that if they but knew my thoughts, they would flee from me in horror, as from a striking rattlesnake! To win the caresses of women, and to smile to think how the smitten creatures would scream if they but knew the acts of which I was capable! To sit with solemn, stodgily respectable business associates who became apoplectic in their denunciation of the mildly progressive elements in the Democratic and Republican parties, and to chuckle at the speculation as to their attitude, did they but know that I regarded the average active anarchist as a mild and sentimental fool, not intelligently ruthless enough by half to be rated a man of true wisdom! It’s been good fun, Bergstrom! And through it all I have maintained my reputation as the most stubbornly reactionary conservative of all the conventional lot. In public, in conversation with my most intimate friends, I give no quarter to any liberal or conventional idea. Should some one in authority be seized with the fantastic idea of investigating all the men of my type and position in the United States, in search of a possible traitor to the clan, I should be looked up last and least. I have been shrewd, Bergstrom—shrewd!”

“And you have been a part of the underworld all this while?” Watson asked.

“Not directly. I first came in touch with criminal life when I was twenty-six years old. I wanted to kill a man, but

feared to commit the murder myself, because it was so well known that I was his enemy. I sought and found a man from the underworld who would do the work for money. It was so simple! After that I often had men put out of the way—and women too, occasionally. Twice I did the work myself, but I found that I derived no greater enjoyment from attending to the matter personally, whereas I inevitably increased the risk. It was just as satisfactory for me to be the cause of having it done by another. And what sport it has been, Bergstrom! Some acquaintance at the club would offend me, and I would decide to have him put away. Sometimes I would delay having the matter attended to for weeks, just for the joy of gloating over the poor fool, watching him go on with his plans for life. He was proud, perhaps, in the belief that he had successfully humiliated me; but I knew all the while that when I spoke a word his life would end. I played with them as a cat plays with a mouse, only they were never conscious of my teeth and claws as I toyed with them, until I had had my fill of fun and they felt the one obliterating spasm of pain that follows the quick death blow.

"There was an especial enemy of mine, whose destruction I accomplished through my friends of the underworld. I really hated the man, and I considered a violent death too brief an agony to inflict on him. A group of clever criminals accomplished his ruin at my dictation. They tricked him into a situation so shamefully compromising that he shot himself, rather than face a world informed of the infamy of which he was apparently guilty.

"Through that affair I became fairly well acquainted with a number of criminals, although only one of them knew my identity, or even so much as saw my face unmasked. I became interested in their lives, and continued to use them for my convenience, when occasion prompted; but it did not occur to me to associate myself with them directly, to become a leader, director, and coördinator of their various activities, until during the war."

The masked man paused. Watson saw the skin of his cheek and jaw visible below the mask grow white, and noted that his lips were drawn into a line, and that his right hand, resting on the table, was drawn into a tightly knuckled fist. When he spoke again his voice was bitter.

"There is a day coming when that which we speak of as evil will be dominant in the world," he prophesied grimly. "Evil is true, and the truth will ultimately triumph. During the war I became convinced that the day of evil was at hand. All over the world men were killing one another, learning to disregard one of the rules essential to the maintenance of the established order—'thou shalt not kill.' Millions of men were being killed, other millions were in military service, away from their families, and so another bulwark of Christianity was threatened—the home. I thought that the great day had come, Bergstrom. I was sure of it. Evil was to reign, and I looked about to make sure of my place among the nobility of the new order when the change should come.

"In the early years of the war I was confident that the central powers would win, and would eventually establish their rule in the United States. I made friends with their agents in this country, and put myself at their disposal. They had money to pay to men who were willing to take desperate chances, and who had no scruples. Through my previous connection with the underworld I was able to get the right men for them. That service endeared me to the agents of the central powers, and earned me the confidence of many expert criminals. If the central powers had won the war, and had invaded the United States, I can tell you that my name would have been written in history as the most successful and spectacular traitor of all time.

"But victory was not to be. Even with the signing of the armistice, however, I did not give up hope that the day of evil was at hand. All over the world there were rumblings of revolution. In the inevitable chaos of revolution there might be opportunity for the evil minority, well organized, to seize and hold power.

"It was then that I retired from business and began strengthening my connections with the underworld. If I could gain the rulership of the criminals, and hold that rulership at the moment when the revolution broke in the United States—do you begin to understand my dream, Bergstrom? Not more wildly impossible than the strategy successfully practiced by the Bolsheviks in Russia, when they first gained control of the government there. And then, by my increasing control and organization of the

criminal forces of the United States, I believed that I could aid in hastening the hour of revolutionary triumph.

"During the last three years most of those incidents to which the newspapers refer as bomb outrages occurred at my direction. I realize now that they were futile, but for a time I believed that they would aid the cause of revolution by encouraging to action men who hate the established order, and yet fear to attack it. Bah! Even the men who profess to despise the conventional virtues, and to be willing to serve evil at the first opportunity, are nearly as befogged by the superstition of good as the avowed servants of the current religions and governments. I talked with many revolutionary agents from Europe. Their talk was big, but when it came to performance they were all more or less bound by the ties of the conventions in which they pretended not to believe. Even when they committed some violence, it was at the prompting of an emotional fervor, and not the result of cool, satanic thought. They talked of right and wrong, of justice and injustice, with all the silly passion and lack of logic one expects from a country parson delivering a Fourth of July address. Not one of them was intelligently ruthless, completely, clear-headedly evil. I began to realize that the hour of triumph was not to strike in my hearing."

"It has only been postponed," Watson said confidently.

The masked man nodded agreement.

"I know that, but I shall have spent my hour of life before it comes. You see, Bergstrom, I intrenched myself with the criminal world in preparation for the great hour. I now find myself in control of a vast criminal power; but the order of yesterday remains the order of to-day, and instead of reigning as a king over a nation of

evil, I rule as an outlaw in an underworld overlaid and borne down by the accumulated weight of two thousand years of tradition. Ah, do not imagine that I regret my position, Bergstrom! No—but I realize that with the world as it is, I shall one day be discovered, and my power will be overthrown. The average of accidents insures that. Needless to say, I shall not be taken alive, to be tried in a court of law. If the cards fall right, there may be a thrilling and prolonged finale after the hounds really get my scent. I have a steam yacht always ready. I should dodge them and fight them to the very last, and then—well, it may prove a spectacular end, Bergstrom, one worthy of me!

"In the meantime I am having wonderful sport, and I want you to enjoy it with me. Not a crime of any magnitude has been committed in the Atlantic States in the last two years that was not planned or approved by me. And what a glorious passion it is, Bergstrom! Not another lust of mind or body but what is dulled by satiety; but the pure passion to rob, Bergstrom, the passion to rob and kill and ruin—ah! Why, man, you and I together can—"

A knocking on the door interrupted him.

"Yes?" the masked man called.

The servant who had led Watson into the house opened the door and stood on the threshold.

"Mr. Arthur Leveridge to see you, sir," he said.

The masked man nodded.

"Good! Send him right up."

Arthur Leveridge! The servant's announcement stirred Watson to an emotional state as near akin to blind, helpless panic as any he had ever known. Leveridge would enter the room, recognize him, and denounce him. What then? The death of a trapped animal, snared in a cage.

(To be concluded in the October number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

THE LOST WOODS

My woods are gone—there is a road right through them;
And I suppose to you who never knew them
'Tis well enough that there on either side
Stretches the same green silence far and wide;
But what if with a sword right through the middle
Of your own heart, with one clean, polished stroke,
One made a smooth divide,
Leaving two perfect halves on either side?
Would you be satisfied?

R. Merton Hall

The Charm

THE STRANGE ROMANCE OF PAULINE MADSON AND HER LONG-LOST LOVER

By Howard Erickson

A YOUNG girl with buoyant, smiling face and hair like ripe wheat stood amid a drab and gabbling throng of immigrants upon the steerage deck of a great steamer in the harbor of New York.

Pauline Madson clutched tightly under her arm a canvas-covered bundle containing all her worldly possessions. With her free hand she shaded earnest blue eyes to peer into the maze of roofs and towers that gleamed resplendent or darkly scowled in the brilliant sunshine, beneath the vernal morning sky.

The sprightly, almost voluptuous figure in its coarse but simple garb thrilled in an ecstasy of anticipation. Heaven—a fairer heaven than any promised in the grim prospectus of her gospel—was about to open wide its golden doors. How her heart danced within her as she prepared to set foot upon this new and magic shore!

The harsh, sullen sod of her childhood, like the awful physical sickness from which she had so recently recovered upon the ship, was behind her forever. Her miserable youth, spent in toil and want and ugliness, was but a bitter memory of a time never to be resurrected.

John was awaiting her in the huge, strange city, to take her far away to a home of light and life, somewhere in the boundless prairies of the West. How she had drugged and scrimped and even begged from hard-pressed distant kin to obtain the price of transportation to the paradise of fadeless dreams! For John had met sickness and trouble in his two years in America, and had been unable to send her the money for the voyage.

A motherly hand was laid upon her arm. She turned to face the kind American lady in the shiny silk dress and fur cloak. The wrinkled, sallow face of the elder woman glowed with interest.

Mrs. Anna Jepson was returning from a visit to the old country. Though she was not above traveling third class, she did not associate with any of her fellow voyagers except Pauline. She had grown deeply attached to the pretty immigrant maiden.

"Have you made up your mind to come with me?" she asked.

"John will be waiting," said Pauline.

"Bah! I'll bet he won't meet you. He didn't send you money for a ticket. He's no good. Better come along to Minnesota."

Pauline looked shocked and hurt.

"All right!" grumbled Mrs. Jepson in impatient disappointment.

Kissing Pauline, she hurried off to see to her bags and parcels. A few steps away she turned to wave an adieu, but the girl did not note the gesture. She was absorbed in the pictured face inside the cover of her watch—the face of a youth with eyes of silver green and a sad and hesitating smile.

She had forgotten Mrs. Jepson's existence. A few hours later, however, a terrible circumstance recalled the old woman and her croak of evil.

John did not meet her!

II

IN after years Pauline Madson could hardly sense the dreadful days she spent in futile waiting for him at Ellis Island. She lay sobbing, heartbroken, on a narrow cot in her refuge in the welter of humanity at the gateway of a land that smiled no longer. She thought of nothing but that John was not there, hoped for nothing but that he would come.

She looked up through tear-dulled eyes at a hail in a well-remembered voice in the strange English tongue. It was the nice lady of the steamer. Mrs. Jepson displayed as little sorrow as surprise at the news of John's defection.

"Come home with me," she insisted, reverting to their native language. "I will pay your way. I want somebody in my house. I am all alone, and I am getting old."

But the girl wanted to find John. He had promised to meet her. Something had happened. She must find him. She had his letters written from a water front boarding house. He had been unloading freight from ships.

With many a grunt and snarl, Mrs. Jepson consented to help, and the two spent days exploring the sordid abodes of the rough drudges of the docks and the deep, but without unearthing trace of John Enochson. The only place that answered the description of the vague address he had given had been torn down to make way for a second-hand clothing store.

Pauline would have remained to pursue the search further, but the strong-willed, selfish woman dissuaded her. She wanted this girl, who seemed the image of what her daughter lost in childhood might have been if she had lived. Besides, she hated and distrusted the whole race of men. In her rare reference to her late husband she spoke of him as "the devil." John was a fool or scoundrel not to keep faith with a girl like Miss Lena, as she had begun to call her.

"Forget the bum!" she advised.

Miss Lena could record her name and place with the immigration authorities. If John would go to inquire for her, as he would if he wanted her at all, they could tell him to write to her at Mrs. Jepson's home. Even if he did not learn her address, where would she stand more chance of meeting him than in the new world rendezvous of migrating northmen beyond the Mississippi?

Pauline saw the logic of this. Besides, what would become of her, without money or friends, and ignorant of Yankee speech, in this place of grime and thunder among so many million strangers?

So she accompanied Mrs. Jepson across the bewildering vastness of America to her dwelling place near the little town of St. Thor, in Minnesota.

The young woman settled down to her new tasks in her new home. Hopefully she waited for a letter from her lover; but John Enochson did not write. He seemed to have dropped through the crust of the earth's surface.

In the husband's lifetime the Jepson home had been a scene of such unpleasantness and bickering that it had been shunned by the neighbors. After the man died, his widow, grown misanthropic and hateful, discouraged their advances. She went nowhere and had no visitors.

Pauline welcomed this isolation. Immersed in her grief, she shrank from people. After vain attempts to be "sociable," they let her alone in what they looked upon as her oddity or pride.

It was a tranquil, easy life, differing vastly from the harshness of the service she had known among the petty aristocracy of the old country. Mrs. Jepson treated her as her own child. In time she ceased to think of herself as Pauline Madson. In her own mind, as to the old woman and all the countryside, she was Miss Lena, the Widow Jepson's daughter.

Mrs. Jepson had one great fear—that Miss Lena might marry. With her heart envenomed by her unhappy matrimonial experience, and wanting the girl to herself alone, she employed every artifice she knew to keep her from the sight and company of men. She even cautioned her against the gnarled old Seaweedson, her tenant, who lived in solitude in a shack on a corner of the eighty-acre farm and performed all the outer chores about the woman's house, even to her "trading" at the stores in town.

When obliged to talk of John Enochson, Mrs. Jepson persisted in calling him John Knudson or John Jorgenson. She classed him as less worthy of regard than "the devil," hitherto considered the least estimable of mankind.

To spare herself the pain of listening to the old woman's sarcasms, Miss Lena refrained entirely from mention of John. To mask her eager watching for the mail carrier, she would go out on the front stoop with her broom as the hour for his coming neared. While she swept the worn pine floor, she could gaze across the pasture land to where the north and south road from St. Thor loomed a thin black line. A quarter of a mile to the east this highway crossed the thoroughfare upon the edge of which the woman lived.

When the postman's horses and high-wheeled wagon hove in sight around the bend by Larson's grove, Miss Lena would follow their course along the St. Thor track with restless orbs to the corner where the carrier distributed mail and turned and

drove away from her home. When he and the neighbor women had gone their various ways, she would voyage to the Jepson box to learn if he had brought her letter; but always she returned with empty heart.

III

WHEN Mrs. Jepson died, she bequeathed her home and little fortune to the woman whose charm and bloom had been spent in sorrow at her side. Miss Lena experienced no deep grief at her patron's passing. Her most vivid emotion had been regret that John Enochson was not there to share her heritage.

For always she thought of John. In the early years of waiting she had prayed to her God to send him to her. She no longer prayed, believing that God had forgotten her; but she never ceased to hope that the lover of her youth would find his way to her arms at last.

She lived on in the little home that had been left her, in greater isolation than of old, burying herself in her own sad dreams of forfeited bliss.

Leaden weeks and months and years dragged by till Miss Lena grew gray and shriveled, with a dull and hardened face, daily disappointment and unfulfilled desire poisoning her against fate and humankind.

She scarcely saw a human being save old Seaweedson, who tilled her land and cut her wood and did her "trading," just as he had done for "the devil's wife" in her day.

Each day the neighbors noted her on the porch of mornings, sweeping mechanically as the carrier passed, and trudging to the box at the crossroads for the letter that never awaited her there. From the postman they long ago had learned that not once in all his trips had he brought any kind of mail to Lena Jepson. The weekly paper he had delivered in the old woman's lifetime now came no longer.

One by one, upon her treasured almanacs, Miss Lena marked the passing years. Seventeen times she ringed with a heavy circle the solemn roth of March, the anniversary of the day when John and she had planned to meet upon her arrival in the United States.

"Seventeen years and twenty-seven days," singsonged the woman as she stepped, broom in hand, upon the porch one day to begin her diurnal vigil.

She swept the stoop with even, automatic motion, as she had swept it every morning

of the workaday world for years, in breeze or sun or rain or snow.

The winds of spring blew roughly across the meadow beyond the road that ran beside her little home. They bore the damp, sweet smell of the warming earth just faintly turning green. In the bright rays of the early sun the trees along the highway shone with the sheen of perennial bloom.

Miss Lena let the handle of the worn broom rest against the white-painted wall. With a scrawny, yellow hand she smoothed back her tawny hair, now thickly streaked with gray. Beneath the palm of the other hand she gazed searchingly into the distance, to where the black dirt line showed between wide fields of sodded land.

The mail carrier was overdue. It was past ten by the little silver watch she carried fastened to a chain about her neck. She noted this with a hasty glance at the dial, after a lingering look at the picture of a youth with eyes of silver green and a pensive, smiling face treasured within the watch's cover.

Seldom in all these years, in summer, winter, or the season between, had Miss Lena brushed the last bit of dust or mud from the porch before the postman's slug-gard beasts and high-wheeled wagon loomed in her taut vision around the bend by Larson's grove.

Would she get a letter from John to-day? How often with little faith she had watched the post appear! Perhaps John was dead, or had given up his bootless quest for her. Such had been her doubts before. Many and many a time she had gone to the corner with faltering heart after the carrier had passed.

Had her lover forgotten her, and sought consolation in another's arms? So she had asked herself in her vague fears of yore. Again and again, when the neighbor women had met and gossiped with the driver and one another, and vanished with their mail, she had opened the rusty box with hope so faint as to amount almost to despair.

But to-day a restlessness was on her—a feeling that this day there would be news from Joan, or of him. The strange agitation that had been hers since she rose from sleep in the glow and fragrance of the dawn stirred her anew from her wonted torpor as she scanned the black highway for the belated messenger. The postman's unusual delay heightened the expectancy that word from John was on the way.

Listlessly Miss Lena reached for the broom. She stood there with its smooth handle in her grasp, her colorless, lined countenance fixed in somber reverie.

As she had so often done before from her post upon this stoop, or from her parlor rocking-chair within, staring into the quiet flames of the fireplace on a winter night, or through the window into the calm or storm of day, Miss Lena lost herself once more in a wilderness of memories. Her mind sped back across the cheerless past to a scene upon a steamer's deck in the harbor of New York. She saw Pauline Madson with shining eyes and tawny hair amid the drab and babbling throng. She thrilled anew in the ecstasy of the anticipated rendezvous of the immigrant girl and John Enochson.

The woman on the wind-whipped porch shuddered as the rosy picture of her remembrance dimmed and another at Ellis Island arose before her—a picture black with the bitterness she had felt at finding that John was not there.

The figure on the stoop grew tense. Miss Lena noted the horses of the postman cantering before the high-wheeled wagon down the road. The brim of the driver's hat flapped loosely in the gusty air.

With her eyes involuntarily following the mail outfit, Miss Lena's thoughts ranged over her bleak and gloomy life in this prairie home. She lived again the empty years passed in absence from Enochson. How she grudged them—the miserable, hateful years, the blighted youth, the happiness spent and withered in its prime!

The carrier was at the corner. She could see him busying himself at the boxes. Did he have a message for her? The hope engendered by the beautiful April morning rose high in her breast, and her dark reflections fell away before the augury of impending fate.

Impelled by some unaccountable force, she stepped into the house to tidy up her person and give it an effect of charm. Ordinarily she went to the corner arrayed and groomed just as she swept the porch, but to-day she wanted to look her best.

Smiling, she reached into a cabinet and drew out a box of toilet powder and a puff—articles of vanity that Mrs. Jepson had given her on a birthday long ago. They had lain unused till now. Rubbing her skin gingerly with the powder, she paused before the high mirror in the narrow hall. She

patted back her hair and arranged the collar of the coat that she had slipped about her shoulders.

The woman remarked a new light, a sudden fire, in the countenance that had daily stared, drawn and haggard, from the reflecting glass. In the tired, bitter eyes there was a flash of reanimated spirit. The furrowed brow and the scrawny form had become almost soft and voluptuous. In the ashen hair glimmered the sheen of ripe wheat.

She saw, recreated there, the girl that John had loved—the girl with rose and flame and sun in cheeks and eyes and tresses, the beat of youth and life and passion in her northern blood. She stood resuscitated, born anew, as if by some fabled miracle of the olden time.

Miss Lena stepped out of the house and into the roadway as Pauline Madson. She strode toward the corner as faint voices died in the distance. The brisk south wind and the steely sunshine warmed her being. From the full throats of birds poured a tide of harmonic song.

She reached the crossroads, where half a dozen metal boxes formed an irregular ring, and stopped beside one which still bore upon its tarnished side the Widow Jepson's name.

To the woman it seemed a moment of awful solemnity—a moment such as in somber childhood fancy she had visioned when she imagined her soul appearing before the judgment seat of Christ to learn of life or death eternal.

In the damp crossroads, in the blustering wind and stirring sun, she stood at the bar of fate awaiting judgment.

IV

RAISING the mail box lid, Pauline Madson thrust her hand within and clutched a scroll. She drew it forth to find a newspaper with the name of a neighbor tagged upon a fold.

"Beg your pardon, ma'am, but I guess I put Mrs. Johnson's paper in your box."

She turned to look at the speaker. He was a bulky, ruddy-faced man of past middle age, in postman's apparel. She could see his horses standing listlessly in the road a few hundred yards away. In her agitated preoccupation she had not noted his approach.

"Oh, you are the mail man!" she said, "I am quite a bit late," remarked the

man, not seeming to heed her observation. "A fellow gets behind going over a new route the first time."

Pauline's temples pounded with the surge of climbing blood. A new mail man, and she had met him on the day she felt sure that she would hear from John!

She caught a glint of silver green in the man's frayed eyes, a gleam of wistful sadness in the vacant, half mechanical smile, a glint of eyes and smile that had haunted her through an age of waiting.

The postman went on talking while her heart throbbed so fiercely that her whole body quivered with its beating.

"It's queer—I've been driving a route out of St. Thor in almost every direction for more than fifteen years, and I never made this trip before."

The woman who had been Miss Lena for so long continued to scan his face with feverish gaze. God! Could he be John?

"Guess I must be going," spoke the postman, reaching out and taking the paper from her nerveless hand.

"Where is the other man?" she inquired, to protract his stay and to feast her eager, questioning eyes upon him.

He looked at her in surprise for a moment. Then his expression changed.

"Why," he said, "he has quit to go to the old country. I thought you were here with the rest of the women when I told them."

As he told of his predecessor, his hearer listened intently, her interest in the speaker, not his theme.

"He was on this route a long time, fifteen or twenty years, and he never missed a day, he told me. So long!" said the mail man, lifting his hat and turning away.

The sober smile and silver orbs persisted in her vision. She flashed a glance within her watch's lid. Oh, it must be John!

He tramped toward his horses.

The words "Come back, John Enochson!" rose to her lips in a muffled scream, but she could not utter them. She could not summon heart to learn once for all what she so fiercely desired to know.

"I'll find out to-morrow," she compromised, as she directed her steps homeward.

V

ALL that day two faces, two forms, and two voices filled Pauline's consciousness—those of the John of long ago and the John of the mail wagon, if he indeed was John.

The postman was stout and gray and vastly changed from the sweetheart of her youth; but nearly a score of years had made her another woman, she half believed at times. What might they not have done to him?

That night, in dreams, two faces, two forms, and two voices looked and stood and spoke; but always the eyes of silver green and the smile of sadness were the same.

She awoke convinced that the man she had encountered at the crossroads was John Enochson.

Then hope fell low at the recollection that twice before her brooding heart had deceived her with eyes and a smile that seemed like John's, but had not been his.

In days gone by she had fed occasional wayfarers at her door, less in kindness than to learn if among them might perchance be John. When she found there was no chance of it, she would hurry them away with crusts and scraps; but any one resembling him, however vaguely, she would entertain with the best her coarse larder knew, while she would watch him slyly between snatched glances at a sad-eyed, smiling visage framed in her watch's case.

One wanderer with such a smile and eyes she had felt certain was John, till he spoke with a Celtic tang and uncovered a head of dusky hair. Another man—a laborer shocking oats for Seaweedson—pursued her with the memory of his silver orbs and mournful grin, till with trembling tongue she questioned the old farmer and learned that the harvester was born within a mile of her house, and had never been over the county line in all his life.

Hope rose again as she recalled the native fairness in the postman's thatch of grizzled hair, and recognized in his Americanized speech the accent of her birthland. She must see him at the corner to-day; but she could not ask him if he were Enochson before the curious neighbor women who would meet them there.

While cooking breakfast, eating it, and washing the dishes, she pondered how to satisfy herself past all doubt that this was John.

She went out upon the stoop at the usual hour. The mail was late again, and she swept with slow strokes for minutes that seemed as hours, till the horses and the high-wheeled wagon came in view.

It was a morning the mate of yesterday, with hard, bright sunlight and brisk, warm-

ing winds. Across the brilliant green of vernal fields, Pauline surveyed the stooped figure of the postman, his hat brim flapping in the blast. He did look like John, even at this distance, despite the fifteen years and more of shifting time.

As she swept on, an idea of cunning flashed through her heavy mind. She would arrive at the corner, as before, when all had left, and would then call to the mail man to wait for a letter she wanted him to take.

But what letter? Her thoughts moved faster. She would give him a letter addressed to John Enochson!

She rushed into her bedroom, and from a dresser drawer she dug stationery, ink, and pen, long laid away. Across the face of a yellowed white envelope she scrawled "John Enochson," and in the upper left-hand corner her own name, "Pauline Madson."

She stopped at the mirror, licked the flap, and sealed the empty envelope, while she looked at herself with the same exultant sense of new-born youth that she had experienced the day before. Dabbing her face with powder, she hastened out of doors.

As Pauline stepped along the soggy path, she heard talk faintly echoing into silence. She would have to hurry to reach the corner before Enochson had passed beyond the sound of her voice.

She felt her blood thrill again in the boisterous wind and smiling sunlight. The grass flashed a dazzling green. Birds sang with vibrant melody.

Pauline gasped with relief. The women had gone, but the postman's wagon was standing in the road a little distance away. The driver was on the ground beside one of the horses, fussing with a hame strap.

As he turned to clamber into the vehicle, he saw Pauline. She held aloft the envelope, and he approached to get it.

She placed the paper in her skirt pocket, shrinking from the imminence of a "yes" or "no" from the lips of fate.

She snapped open her watch cover, then clicked it shut again, fearing even to look upon the pictured face within.

As the man neared her, she ransacked her mind for a scheme to keep him from asking for the missive. Her glance caught the dull shine of a metal charm hooked into a leathern chain that showed beneath the half open folds of his heavy coat.

Peering into the postman's face with its eyes of silver green and doleful smile, she said tremulously:

"That's an odd charm you've got." Her interest in the trinket was not wholly assumed, for there was something about it mysteriously familiar. "May I see it?"

The postman unfastened the charm and handed it to Pauline. She gazed at it in a kind of fascination. On its worn surface she read these letters in the script of her native country:

P. M. to J. E.

It was a watch charm she had given John at parting, on the day when he sailed for America. She had told him that it would reunite them in that wide land so far away. How strange it was that the little token had since escaped her memory, to come into her hands at the moment when she was face to face with John at last!

The postman was speaking, but though she heard she did not grasp his words, so absorbed was she in the magic of the charm.

"Who gave you this?" asked Pauline Madson, her face alight with rapture.

He answered like a man reciting something he had said before.

"I got it from the man who has been on this route, John Enochson. In his hurry to get ready to take the train for New York, to sail for the old country, he left the charm still fastened to the watch chain that he gave me as a farewell present. He'll feel terrible when he finds he hasn't got it."

"He has gone to the old country!" stammered the woman.

The postman nodded. Miss Lena's lips moved convulsively, but no sound came from them.

"Yes—he is going back to see if he can't find a girl that he was to have met years ago in New York. He was sick or something, and couldn't be there when the ship docked. Later he heard she was out this way, and he came on to St. Thor; but nobody around here knew any woman with her name, so he gave up looking. After a while he got it in his head that she never left the old country at all."

"Didn't he write back there to find out?" faltered the woman.

"He did, but he never got any answer; so he just settled down to this R. F. D. job and saved his money so he could go across and look her up. He said he knew

she would be waiting for him. He left this morning—or he did if he made that train," added the postman, looking at his watch.

VI

THE blue skies and green fields grew gray and barren before Miss Lena's eyes. The wind blew chill, and the song of birds rang in her ears like a dirge. John was gone, and hope of his return died in her heart. Fate had decreed that they should never see each other again!

"Whoa there!" the postman shouted at his horses, who had wandered from the highway to munch the tempting grass.

He held out his hand, but not for the charm, which he had forgotten.

"Where's your letter? I've got to go," he said, turning to the woman.

She was walking down the road in the other direction from his horses. They were grazing perilously near the loose barbed wire, and he started to them.

With leaden heart and feet, Miss Lena made her way along the wagon track toward her desolate abiding place. Clapsed tightly in her hand she carried the token of her lost love, the charm that John had worn as he daily rode almost past her door, in her very sight, for so many years.

She did not hear the tramp of trotting horses' feet or the sound of hurried wheels in the St. Thor road; but the postman heard. He swung about to face an excited man who leaped out of a livery rig and ran to where he stood.

"Here!" cried the newcomer, who was garbed in crinkly clothes of holiday effect. "Give me that charm! I never missed it till I got to the station. I turned around and hired a team, and came right after you to get it. I never could find her without the charm. Hurry up so I can take the afternoon train!"

"She has it," apologized the mail man, pointing toward the departing feminine figure. "She just got to looking at it and took it with her, without either of us thinking that she hadn't given it back."

"Watch my horses a minute, will you?" said the other, as he hurried after the woman.

The postman stood with his hand on the bridle rein of the nearest horse, and listened impatiently to indistinct and feverish exclamations from the man and the woman a stone's throw away.

"You'll have to hurry, if you want to get that train!" he shouted.

"I am not going to take the train!" came the answer, in a voice of exultant joy. "I am not going back to the old country. I have found right here what I intended to look for there!"

Every morning, as of old, a postman's horses appear around the bend by Larson's grove and move along the thin black line between the fields of sodded land to the crossroads, where their driver distributes mail, as John Enochson did before him.

The neighbor women meet the courier as of yore, gossip with him and with one another, and disappear with their mail and with words of cheer and laughter; but they never see Miss Lena sweep her barren stoop in dust and snow and sun and rain to watch the postman pass. They do not see her go alone to the corner for word of John—word that never came till at last he came himself.

Often at eventide, when their daily work is done, a woman with happy face and heart and a man with eyes of silver green and shining smile stroll to the crossroads for the casual mail that now and then awaits them at the box with the name of "John Enochson" scrawled in paint across its rusted side.

ILLUSIONS

I LOOKED into a baby's eyes
And saw a poem there;
But when I turned away from them
It vanished on the air.

I gazed into a woman's eyes
And pictured heaven there;
But when I went away from her,
Lo, heaven was everywhere!

Beth Cheney-Nichols

A Flash of Genius

THE FINANCIAL AND MATRIMONIAL MASTER STROKE OF HOSTEEN MAILITSO OF THE NAVAHOS

By W. R. Leigh

THE soul of Hosteen Mailitso—Mr. Yellow Fox—was sad. He sat on the brink of Keam's Cañon, looking across at the opposite wall, half a mile distant.

The opposing cliffs were steeped in the mellow rose-orange glow of a wondrous summer sunset, with patches of turquoise shadow contrasting like jewels set in a bracelet of gold. Where the lone figure crouched motionless, the ardent rays of sunlight were interrupted by a piñon forest. A stratification of rusty red rock, six feet thick, supplied the trees with nutriment. They extended half a mile back on the mesa, and dwindled until they came to an end at the edge of the red rock formation. The red rock, eroding more rapidly than the harder cream-pink layer upon which it rested, had left a broad, flat expanse of the latter between itself and the margin of the chasm.

Here, in this deserted place, on the broken edge of the wide band of sandstone, skirting the cañon's wild windings—a pearl-gray floor, interrupted only by one shallow pocket of water mirroring the yellow sky—sat the young man, silently hugging his knees.

The night hawks, thousands of feet aloft, sent faint bellowings down to break the silence. The bats, in their eccentric evolutions, emitted squeaks and chatterings. A horned owl, hidden in the woods, indulged in his weird mutterings and ghoulish laughter; but all these sounds were unnoticed by the Indian.

His eyes were resting upon the opposite wall, where the same rock formations were repeated, and the same sort of forest crowned the cliffs. Above the belt of timber a thin wisp of smoke stole up into the still air, and a twinkling speck beneath it

indicated that supper was in preparation before a hogan.

The age-old story! About that fire moved Chagitso—Black Bird with Yellow Wings—a comely maiden of eighteen.

She was not visible at this distance, among the cedars and piñons, but it was not necessary to see her, for her admirer had arrived at the edge of the cañon in time to observe her driving the herd of goats and sheep up the trail on the opposite side, and he knew she was taking them home from the water hole at the bottom.

He also knew that she was not unfavorably inclined toward him, though he had said nothing to her on the subject. He had said nothing because words were superfluous. Each knew from the other's eyes all that was necessary to be known. Why, then, was Hosteen Mailitso sad?

The father of the maiden, Hosteen Shash—Mr. Bear—was a shrewd business man. Through his enterprise and financial genius he had acquired great herds of goats and sheep, large bands of ponies, burros, and cattle. Also his saddle and bridle were lavishly adorned with silver, and his spurs, of the same metal, were solid and weighed more than a pound each.

Besides, he wore a pearl-handled revolver and earrings and bracelets that were the envy of all who beheld them; but his necklaces—on the whole reservation few could rival them, none could surpass them. He had great ropes of huge beads interspersed with squash blossoms and pendent swastikas made of silver. He had strings of red coral and silver beads, with heavy silver pendants. He had massive ropes of pinkish-gray shells, richly interspersed with sticks of red coral and immense pieces of the choicest turquoise. He had obsidian arrowheads for good luck, and marvelous

strings of disks of abalone shell, and brass beads.

Moreover, this wonderful man possessed red, yellow, green, and purple head bands of the finest silk, and no end of belts made up of silver disks richly carved, with massive silver buckles. In short, he was a financial baron. He was more—he was a high financier, and would surely demand a very substantial gift in exchange for his daughter's hand.

Now, in view of the fact that Hosteen Mailitso possessed, all told, a sprung-kneed, spavined pony, a native saddle in the last stages of decrepitude, an old rope, and the rags on his back, the prospects for the success of his suit seemed anything but brilliant; and this, serious as it appears, was not the most baffling difficulty.

The mother of the fair Chagitso was an unusually stalwart and aggressive old person—the type that has contributed in all times and climes to the proverbial disrepute of the mother-in-law. Nowhere else on earth, probably, is this disrepute so pronounced as among the Navahos, for they firmly adhere to the belief that one glance at one's mother-in-law will result in total and inevitable blindness.

The explanation of this belief is to be sought in the distant past, when, the race being threatened with extinction from disease and infertility, a great gathering of the wise men was held. These seers perceived that inbreeding was the source of their troubles, and stringent laws were made forbidding marriages between relations. To insure the young man's taking a bride from a different clan, and establishing an independent home of his own, these primitive philosophers invented the story concerning the mother-in-law and blindness. So absolutely fixed is this idea that sometimes, it is said, blindness actually follows in such cases.

Hosteen Mailitso, well disposed toward all mankind, was particularly prone to be good to himself. The prospect of going blind, therefore, appealed to him so little that until now he had steadfastly and firmly resisted the seductive glances which so often fell in his direction; for he was tall and straight, and possessed a peculiarly ingratiating smile.

Now, however, he was confronted with the imperative necessity of going to work or getting married, for the hospitality of his nearest friends was wearing perilously

threadbare, and at cards and dice he had no skill. Of the two possibilities, marriage alone was to be seriously considered, for that would provide some one to work for him.

Bad as the situation was, a further complicating element had lately been added. Hosteen Shash, with the egotism and arrogance apt to proceed from the possession of great wealth, had seen fit to put aside his wife of long standing and to take unto himself a younger and more comely mate. This had created a state of chronic irritability between the two ladies concerned. The elder of the two, especially, had become so subject to sudden fits of reckless rage, upon the slightest provocation or no provocation, that safety was not in her neighborhood.

Hence the sadness of Hosteen Mailitso.

II

THE magical luster faded from the opposite cañon walls, and the purple shadow of the world crept up the eastern sky. The bats, in flocks, skimmed and darted and wrangled in their greed as they captured insects. Crickets chirped, and katydids vied with tree frogs in emitting a succession of monotonously even sounds.

The young Indian rose to his feet. The first stars were beginning to appear, and the speck of light on the opposite side was more vivid.

His cogitations had brought him no comfort. The young man automatically fell in with the spirit of his surroundings, and began a chant in a low, monotonous tone, which gradually rose and gathered force until all the other surrounding sounds were drowned. His chant seemed a strange, indescribable echo from out of the past, when man was half brother to the beast. It had the wildness that inheres in the howl of a coyote.

Mailitso strolled back to where his superannuated pony dozed beside a cedar snag, and mounted. He made for the head of a villainous trail by which, with due care and reasonable luck, the bottom of the cañon might be reached.

Nothing more definite than a hazy hope that something might transpire which he could turn to his advantage actuated the movements of Hosteen Mailitso, as he crossed the cañon and began the ascent toward the speck of light. He expected that Hosteen Shash's passion for gambling, and

his habit of playing for high stakes, would, as usual, have resulted in attracting several cronies equally infatuated; and he was not mistaken.

As he gained the top of the mesa and approached the hogan of Hosteen Shash, he perceived the latter seated on the ground, with his new spouse beside him, and three men in a circle, a little to one side of a brisk fire. The four men were absorbed in a card game; the women looked on. Fetching in wood was the fair Chagitso; but the prospective mother-in-law—where was she?

Apprised of his coming by the yelping of the mongrel canines that aided the industrious Chagitso with her herds, the new spouse cast a glance backward, and pronounced the name of the newcomer.

Hosteen Shash paused in the act of placing a higher bet. The pot was large, one of the men, at the end of his cash resources, having taken a treasured necklace from his neck and laid it on the heap.

A frown creased the brow of the financier. He was a careful and thoughtful father, and the idea of his daughter marrying this vagabond was peculiarly distasteful to him. It was more—it was acutely painful, for there was no chance of a present commensurate with the value of so strapping a lass as his Chagitso. In fact, it was doubtful whether anything whatever would be forthcoming.

Such a piece of bad bargaining would injure his reputation for shrewdness and firmness. It would make him such a laughing stock among his people as to imperil his standing and authority in the councils of the wise men.

He had considered the feasibility of hinting to the ne'er-do-well to steal sufficient stock from the Hopis to pay for the maid, but he convinced himself that the youth would be too cowardly to attempt it. He also knew that the reservation stockman would be extremely likely to discover the thief and jail him—to which Hosteen Shash would have had no objection whatever, save that as a consequence the stolen property would be seized.

Furthermore, it was harrowingly painful to contemplate himself as the victim of an endless series of beggings, wheedlings, teasings, and cajolings resorted to by a worthless lout who would not scruple to capitalize the misery of his family. On all grounds, therefore, it was aggravating, absurd, preposterous, to have this undesirable

fellow so persistently hanging around. A decisive stand should and must be taken. Mailitso must be driven away and kept away, for was he not interfering with the visits of other swains?

There was no escaping the fact that the young man's ingratiating smile had made a certain impression on the heart of the sentimental Chagitso. All the more reason, therefore, that no time should be lost.

The hand that was about to place the bet remained indecisively poised in air. The great man was glancing over his shoulder. Immediate action was imperative; but what action? What could he do?

The impatient players glanced at one another, and smiled. Hosteen Shash caught the smile from the corner of his eye, and it increased his anger toward the intruder. What could he do to drive away this nuisance? Should he sick the dogs on him?

Nothing was more certain than that with the first show of fight on Mailitso's part, the curs would run for their lives; yet it would be an insult—an unequivocal proclamation of sentiment and intentions. Hosteen Shash called to the mongrels, but these, having through long experience become skillful in discriminating between friendly and angry voices, skulked cautiously to a safer distance.

On top of this aggravation, one of the players cleared his throat ostentatiously.

Down came the hand on the pile of treasure, and the plutocrat scowled ominously around the circle. Nothing daunted, the owner of the necklace called, and the newcomer stepped near just in time to see the big pot lost by the wizard of finance.

Hosteen Shash felt that Mailitso was responsible for the loss of this important haul. It was the young man's intrusion which had distracted his attention and interfered with his play. He hated the blundering fool with tenfold intensity.

The interloper, fully aware of his prospective father-in-law's state of mind, assumed an air of blank non-comprehension, and cheerfully disposed himself at full length upon the sand, to watch the game. There were no greetings, for Navahos have no words of salutation in their language. All the faces in the circle wore especially stolid expressions. All eyes apparently avoided Mailitso; but furtive glances fell in his direction, none the less.

The bland smile of Mailitso suggested that he understood just how to handle the

situation. One of the players slyly nudged his neighbor with his elbow. The quick eye of Shash caught the movement, and its meaning was not lost on him. There was born in his breast a sudden fierce impulse—a savage determination to leap upon the visitor and beat him up in such frightful fashion as to insure himself against any repetition of the intrusion. Just as he was about to carry out this program, however, a whisper in the ear of his inner consciousness suggested the possibility of ignominious defeat. The scoundrel was young and well grown; vanquished, Shash would present a ridiculous figure indeed.

He found his thoughts continually straying from the game, to frame wild plots and impossible revenges. He found his adversaries taking advantage of his distraction, and himself missing opportunities to work his usual tricks.

Mailitso observed this also, with secret satisfaction, and he smiled sweetly.

Chagitso came with a mighty armful of wood, and cast it on the ground. She did not so much as glance in the swain's direction; but this disconcerted him not at all, for it is not the custom among Indians to betray any signs of interest in such cases. Equally it was not permissible for him to help her carry another load, for he would have been deemed a woman man, and most witheringly scorned by the gentle object of the attention. He lay, therefore, watching the game of cards, which proceeded in grim silence.

Not being vitally interested in the play, the youth had time to observe that he was not the only spectator whose attention was divided. The eyes of the new spouse intermittently searched the dark spaces beyond the radius of firelight.

Seeking an explanation, Mailitso presently made out the dim form of the discarded wife among the sage clumps, some fifty yards distant. In the gloom of the moonless night he could distinguish motions, which puzzled him, until it dawned upon him that she was beckoning.

The old woman was the mother of many children, for whom she had cared faithfully, and most of whom she had reared. She had been a true and loyal helpmate during many years. She had braved innumerable hardships, had toiled ceaselessly beside her man, and had been no small factor in amassing the wealth that was his; and now she was cast aside. Like women

the world over, she attributed all the blame to the new wife. It was the younger woman's wiles—her guile—which had wrought the change. Shash was all right, she declared, until this vixen crossed his path—turned his head—bewitched him!

To suggest to her that he was as much to blame as the woman, and perhaps more, would have called forth only denial and scorn. She would have despised the person who dared voice such slander against her man; yet deep in her own heart she feared that it was true, and she hated Shash for his inconstancy.

She was ready to forgive him in an instant, should he give up the younger wife and return to her; but this other woman—there was no relenting toward her. Even if discarded, dying of hunger, mortally wounded, she would remain forever an object of execration. The interloper had trampled upon the older woman's pride. The rank injustice of her supersession, together with her supplanter's triumphant and glib attitude, had engendered a hunger for revenge—a desire to kill.

In the breast of the young woman, on the other hand, was the feeling of rightful ownership through conquest. She hadn't made any advances, or set any traps—not she! She had merely looked charming, which she couldn't help. She had hung her head, put one finger to her mouth, looked at Shash from the corner of her eye, smiled, and refused to talk.

Yes, she had refused to say a word in response to all his banterings, and had even declined to accept a fine watermelon from him, on one memorable occasion, though her mouth was watering for it. That is, she refused it until he pressed her very, very hard, and then accepted it only on condition that he should at once go on about his business and cease to pester her. She considered herself, therefore, wholly blameless.

Was it her fault if he persisted in riding up to the hogan with cans of delicious peaches and tomatoes, and boxes of crackers? Had she had anything to do with it when he proposed ten horses and fifty sheep to her father, as a last and final purchasing price for her, after much haggling? She had simply accepted from fate—as any but a fool must have accepted—such favors as that power had seen fit to bestow. She had received the natural deserts of the fit and suitable.

It was therefore no concern of hers that the old woman felt aggrieved. How could she help it?

Why didn't the other accept second place with dignity and cheerfulness? These mutterings and scowlings, these vindictive attempts to compromise the new wife with her legitimately won husband, were becoming intolerable.

And now here was a challenge! Here was the old fool daring her to come out and face her! Here was a chance to settle the thing for once and all!

III

THE new wife withdrew her gaze a couple of times, to scan the players. Seeing them absorbed, she softly and slowly edged away from the side of her lord. With the gliding stealth of a panther, she got upon her feet and stole away into the obscurity toward the beckoning figure.

Mailitso watched the two figures approach each other, and pause, a little distance apart.

He raised himself a little higher on his elbow. He saw them rush together with a sudden impetuosity. He saw them sway from side to side, and stagger about. He knew that a violent but grimly mute battle was in progress.

Finally he saw them go down out of sight. He had seen women fight before, and was therefore in no doubt—they were lying on the ground, their hands deep in each other's hair, panting like two tomcats between rounds.

After some hesitation, he pushed Hosteen Shash with his foot. The latter started and glowered threateningly. Was the villain seeking a fight? Shash saw only the saccharine smile. He scowled questioningly, and Mailitso jerked his thumb in the direction of the combatants.

It was borne in upon the rich man that his bride had vanished; but still he did not take in the meaning of Mailitso's pointed thumb, until the gleeful loungee sank his crooked fingers into his mop of hair with a suggestive simulation of violent pulling and hauling.

Hosteen Shash arose with a guttural grunt of dawning comprehension. He looked about, unable to see anything, and vainly hoping that it was a false alarm; but the persistent youth, with a significant gesture, indicated the whereabouts of the conflict.

Why should this grinning idiot chance to be the one to direct his attention to such an unpleasant family affair?

Hosteen Shash stalked off in the direction indicated. The three cronies got on their feet and followed in a businesslike way, well aware that their help would be needed.

It took the combined efforts of the four men to separate the belligerents. When they returned, leading the young bride, she was noticeably the worse for wear, with a long scratch down one cheek.

Without a word, they all sat down in the same order as before, and the game was resumed.

The industrious Chagitsa, after throwing down another load of wood, that the players might have light by which to continue the game into the wee hours of the morning, betook herself to her sheepskins in the brush hogan.

Dreamily noting the disheveled and dust-filled tresses of the bride, and the red mark on her cheek, the young man did not fail to observe the smoldering fire in her half-closed eyes, and the tense clutch of her hand upon her knee. Evidently she was thirsting for another chance at her enemy.

Mailitso put his hands behind his head and lay on his back. Above, the vast tangle of scintillating stars was crossed by a streak of meteor light. The Milky Way rose from one horizon, like a diamond-dusted belt of inconceivable splendor, and, spanning the stupendous dome, sank behind the other horizon.

The hush was broken by the voices of crickets, katydids, and tree frogs, and by the howls of a distant coyote. A fitful breeze made the flames of the fire dance and waver.

The game progressed briskly. Shash was winning, and one of the visitors already had his second necklace in the pot. The moments were tense—so tense that none save Mailitso noticed how, inch by inch, the cautious bride again edged away from the side of her mate, and glided off on hands and knees. With noiseless and deliberate stealth, like a catamount on the prowl, she rose to a crouching posture amid the sage clumps, and made for the shadow that was her waiting enemy.

Again the young man pushed Hosteen Shash with his foot. Again the bridegroom turned, to discover himself once more deserted; but he held a big hand, and there

was a big pot at stake. With a world-weary sigh he sat still.

One of his opponents also held a good hand, and, having lost heavily, was now eager to push the betting. Each believed that the other was bluffing, and each plunged. Finally the visitor called, and the two hands were thrown down. Hosteen Shash had lost—lost the biggest pot of the evening!

He rose. It was exasperating to have one's bride and mascot deserting one at such a moment. It was maddening to be apprised of the fact for the second time by a despicable fellow like Mailitso. Filled with indignation, Hosteen Shash stalked majestically off toward the field of action, followed not only by his cronies, this time, but by Mailitso as well.

"Sister of a dead dog!"

The astonished husband stood for a moment petrified, as he beheld the apple of his eye prone and helpless, being savagely dragged about by the hair.

"Daughter of a rattlesnake!" ejaculated the good man, as he sprang toward the old woman.

The latter was expecting this move. Giving her enemy a final yank and kick, she darted away among the trees with a shriek of mocking laughter.

The vanquished one was lifted to her feet, and was found to be scarcely able to stand. A fierce hurricane of rage sent the husband racing after the victor, but she was fleet of foot and sound of wind. In a short while he returned, puffing and blowing and wiping his brow.

How long was his authority to be defied, and his pride humbled? How often were good games to be disconcerted, and big pots lost in this wise?

IV

WHILE the three cronies conducted the limping bride to the hogan, Hosteen Shash turned dejectedly toward the fire.

Here was his new wife, bleeding at the nose, with a scratched face and half her hair torn out. It would be a week before she was fit for work. Moreover, after this demonstration of her inability to cope with the old Amazon, visions began to loom of what might occur if she were left alone at the hogan. Hosteen Shash was a busy man, with many herds to look after, and it would be quite impossible to lug her about with him every day. It was obvious that

his sturdy daughter would take sides with her mother, or at best remain neutral.

Shash gazed into the fire, sorely perplexed. The longer he gazed, the greater grew his perplexity; for gradually, in the leaping flames and curling smoke, he became aware of a form that was taking shape—the form of a human being. Vaguely its shadowy lines wavered before his eyes, at first; but they became more and more distinct until the prostrate form of—yes, the form of his young wife lay there. It lay there on its back, disheveled, battered, covered with dirt and—and wounds!

Hosteen Shash passed his hand over his eyes and looked again. The horrible thing was still there, but now a stream of blood issued from the swollen lips and ran down over the cheek. Shades of the spirits of darkness!

The bewildered man cleared his throat and shifted his position, but still the picture grew and developed. The flames writhed and twisted like tortured souls, and the prostrate thing seemed to quiver and bleed afresh. Then the howls of the distant coyotes seemed suddenly to take on an unwonted meaning. They were the voices that told of death.

Hosteen Shash clenched his teeth and his fists. A savage resolution began to grow in his mind, but vanished again like mist before the wind, as a terrible laugh broke the silence—a laugh of malice and mockery—a laugh that reverberated from cliff to cliff, and shook the air like the cackle of an evil sprite. At least so it seemed to Shash; but it was only the laugh of Mailitso immediately behind him.

Presently he realized his mistake, and recognized Mailitso's presence. He wheeled and faced the insolent dog, grinding his teeth with inarticulate rage. His hands started upward, eager to take the reprobate by the throat and choke the life out of him. Indeed, they made a grab for the young man's throat, but the throat was just a fraction to one side of where they clutched. They grabbed again, but somehow it was an inch beyond their reach this time.

And still the devilish face was there. The white teeth gleamed like those of a snarling puma, and the two eyes, drawn into oblique slits by the wide-spreading mouth, sparkled like two glowworms.

The financial potentate made a furious dash, with the intention of spoiling that hated face; but it danced away like a will-

o'-the-wisp, and, catching his foot in a root, he stumbled and fell down. Again that cackle, as of an evil sprite!

Struggling clumsily to his feet, aware that, had his enemy seen fit, he could have punished him unmercifully while he was down, Hosteen Shash sullenly returned to the fire, more crestfallen and distraught than ever.

The possibilities of the near future had so wrought upon his imagination that no sooner did his eyes rest upon the flames again, than the same gruesome pictures as before began to develop. He turned his back on the fire, but very soon he seemed to hear repeated, like reverberations, the old woman's shrieks of mocking laughter. Turning, he imagined he saw, not far off among the cedars, the old Amazon seated on one of his fleetest ponies. She appeared to deride and jeer him, and to dare him to pursue her.

His hand caught the handle of his revolver, but when he looked more intently there was nothing to shoot at.

Then the three cronies came back from the hogan, and told him how Chagitso had laughed aloud at her stepmother's plight. So that was the laugh he had heard! And this was the way his daughter was going to act!

"Daughter of a dead coyote buried and dug up again!" the angry magnate exclaimed vehemently.

A hand was laid upon his shoulder. It was the hand of Mailitso. In the eyes of the young man there was a lively light—the light of a brilliant idea—a flash of genius.

"Hosteen Shash!" said he, and paused impressively. "Hosteen Shash, I will marry the old woman."

The suddenness of the proposition staggered the plutocrat; but as its meaning percolated into his distraught understanding, a feeling of immense relief—similar to that experienced by a drowning man upon seeing a rescue boat approaching—revived his spirits. In an instant the lowering clouds that had darkened his firmament began to divide, and a promising ray of sunlight broke through. A grin slowly invaded his countenance, as the possibilities of the suggestion became clearer to his wily imagination.

"I will marry her," continued the youth, "on condition that a month hence you give me your daughter Chagitso."

He paused to observe the effect of the second suggestion. An inscrutable smile had taken the place of the grin. Nevertheless, the youth felt that he held the winning cards in this game, and he proposed to play them to the limit. No trick of Hosteen Shash's could beat a straight flush.

"Your daughter Chagitso," he went on, "with twenty ponies, fifty goats, and fifty sheep."

Avarice, and the propensity for bluffing, narrowed the eyes of the financier to furtive slits; but writhe as he might, there was no escaping the certainty as to what would happen if the peculiarly ingratiating smile of this youngster, accompanied by a proposal of marriage, were brought to bear upon the old woman. It was equally clear that thus the mother-in-law obstacle would be removed from the young man's path. The old lady would be his wife, and, as such, not dangerous to the young man's eyesight when, later on, he married the daughter.

Hosteen Shash was impressed with the hitherto despised wit of Mailitso. He reflected that this arrangement would extricate him from his dilemma, and that his daughter, thus situated, would be better satisfied than in the society of a stepmother little older than herself. From every angle the suggestion improved upon examination. Still, he could not endure to pay such a price for his liberty without an effort at a better bargain.

"Hosteen Shash will give you his wife, his daughter, five ponies, twenty goats, and twenty sheep."

He stated this with an air of finality, and turned away, as if the matter were concluded; but the same hand was laid upon his arm, and the same voice repeated in a soft, low, but determined tone:

"Twenty ponies, fifty goats, and fifty sheep!"

"No!"

The money magnate feigned rage.

"Then Mailitso will go home."

The youth started for his sprung-kneed pony.

"Hold on!" cried Hosteen Shash, as the terrifying alternative loomed before his mind's eye. "Hold on!"

The other paused and looked around.

"Hosteen Shash agrees! Hosteen Shash gives his word! All right!"

Thus was the sadness dispelled from the soul of Hosteen Mailitso.

Six Barrels and a Spitter

THE SENSATIONAL ENDING OF THE GREAT BASEBALL GAME
BETWEEN YEARLING CITY AND RAWHIDE BEND

By James W. Egan

OUT West here in Yearling City, where they ain't rubbed off quite all the wool yet, the grand American game of baseball may not be the daily and diverting amusement she is in them big league burgs back East; but once every season we aim to put on a combat that's the real old rattlesnake's tonsils and the grizzly's whiskers, to boot.

I refer now to the annual conflict between Yearling City's best and a passel of pilgrims who upholds the honor of our neighboring rival, Rawhide Bend. More excitement, more bank rolls, and sometimes more six-guns, are unloosed at this one ball game than used to be on pay day after an old-time association round-up, and for weeks before and after the encounter both towns sizzle like hot bacon grease.

Most generally, when the echoes die away and bets are paid off, Yearling City supporters have been lucky to have a pair of spurs left 'em. Until last year them Rawhide mavericks had beat us six straight times, and usually by ignoble and unworthy scores. Just the same, us hombres always backed the boys to the sky limit. Rawhide Bend might be able to remark and observe about our playing, but never in regard to our sporting blood.

It's disturbing to lose steady and habitual, however, and we sure hankered to hang it on the enemy for once. Last summer it appeared as if the Yearlings might turn the trick. A month or two before the clash, the coaching and handling of the team was taken over by Jack Brand.

Young Jack is the son of old Bill Brand, whose ranch I help manage. The boss has been sending the heir to Cornell, and in that famed institution of learning they don't seem to neglect your baseball education none whatever. In two years they've made

a crack catcher out of Jack, and stuffed his head full of baseball.

So last summer he agreed to pick 'em off the backstop for Yearling City in the big tussle, and also to direct the field maneuvers preceding and during the fray.

By laboring hard and diligent in the time at his disposal, Jack herded together a bunch of tolerable ball tossers. The only place the Yearlings was weak was in the pitcher's box. There was just one hombre who could heave at all, and he was almost as unreliable as a bronc with a burr under the saddle.

Lefty Cann was our sole slinger. Once upon a time Lefty probably was a humdinger of a hurler. That would have been during his youth, in them days when Sitting Bull was getting ready to muss up things for Custer.

But the passing years and the old pilgrim's passion for red liquor had added nothing to Lefty's skill. Rawhide Bend had slugged him plenty in previous games, and even with a good catcher and better backing his efficiency was dubious.

The pitching problem had Jack Brand worried. That young galoot was right anxious to win the coming mêlée.

"If there was some one besides Lefty to chuck," he says, the Saturday a week before the contest, "we'd be sitting pretty for a gallop. The rest of the gang are going strong, and we meet the Rawhidiers on our home grounds; but we need pitching—and I'm afraid of Lefty."

"Likely as not he'll get mooned up the night before the game, and be seeing two or three plates," grumbled Gig Sims, the town marshal. "Wave a bottle under Lefty's nose, and he goes loco."

"He'd better not!" threatened Jack Brand.

"Oh, mebbe there ain't no need of this here fretting," one Luke Yarrow arises to remark. "Lefty Cann is a wise old-timer, and from what I know about baseball, them are the fellows who always have something up their sleeves."

"Even if it's only a glass arm," grins his brother, Duke Yarrow.

"Don't you ever think Lefty has no glass arm!" retorts Luke.

The Yarrows was newcomers to Yearling City, having been in our midst only a few days; but they appeared to take a powerful interest in baseball, and got as warmed up over the annual fracas as our oldest inhabitants. Both of them were husky, hard-looking hombres who might have made good players themselves; yet they disclaimed any ability save in the rooting line. One of 'em—Luke Yarrow—was right friendly with Cann.

"Lefty can pitch a little, that's true," asserts Jack Brand. "However, a little isn't going to be enough against Rawhide Bend. I wish I could import a genuine all-wool flinger! Trouble is, we're too far away from civilization."

"Then I reckon, boys, we'll have to put our trust in the Lord and Lefty's arm," I contribute.

"Well, we're putting our chips on Lefty to win," observes Luke Yarrow. "We aim to get some Rawhide money, if there's any to get."

"You'll find all you want to cover, I allow," Sims tells him. "Them hombres back their boys tolerable well."

"That's what we're looking for," says Duke Yarrow.

A little later, when the Yarrows had ducked off somewhere, the marshal grunts at Jack Brand and me:

"I reckon Duke and Luke mean right enough, but us galoots who've backed the boys year in and year out know what's what, and I allow we lay out as many chips as they will. I ain't got any more confidence in Lefty Cann than you, Jack."

"We'll have to field behind him, and crack that apple hard," says Jack, and turns to me. "I guess Bee will be here in time for the game, Charley. She left New York last night. Sis is a great little fan herself, and how she will root!"

Bee Brand, daughter of the boss, and younger than Jack, had been visiting girl friends in the East, and was supposed to be gone all summer. Perhaps she had got

homesick. I didn't care. We all liked to see busy little Bee around the rancho.

Every evening Jack Brand had the Yearlings out for practice, and he made 'em hustle. All except Lefty Cann. The old southpaw always was lazy.

Bee Brand, dressed fit to kill and just in from the East, was on hand to witness the final practice. She watched the workout with critical eyes.

"Oh, they ain't bad," she murmurs to me. "Not good, of course; but not bad. I hope they lick Rawhide to-morrow. I'm just going to yell my head off, Uncle Charley!"

II

THE practice sessions of the Yearlings, which were held on the rough diamond half a mile out of town, generally drew a crowd, and quite a bunch was on hand this evening. The Yarrow brothers and several others was keeping eyes on Lefty Cann, throwing to Jack Brand.

Just as Lefty signaled that he had sufficient, a stranger riding a rangy pinto cantered up and halted his horse. He gazed at the scene with evident interest.

The newcomer was a lean, tanned young fellow, garbed in khaki, and packing a gun in his belt. Not that this was particularly unusual, for quite a few went heeled in Yearling City. As I mentioned previously and heretofore, all the wool ain't been rubbed off yet.

Swinging off his pinto as Lefty ceased toiling, this pilgrim hailed Jack Brand.

"I'll play catch with you, partner," he calls. "Ain't thrown a baseball for ages. Want to loosen up the soup bone a bit."

Luke Yarrow had an answer for the stranger.

"This is a regular team practice you're hornin' in on, hombre. Reckon the boys ain't got any time to oblige to-night."

"Excuse me," apologizes the pinto's rider. "My mistake! Ain't seen or heard any baseball for so long—"

"Go ahead and throw some to me, if you wish," cuts in Jack Brand. "Pick up a glove and—"

"No, I ain't trying to butt in," says the newcomer. "I didn't see any suits, and I thought the bunch was just fooling around. Of course, if you're practicing, I won't interfere."

"That's all right. I want to catch a few more myself," states Jack.

"I'll just throw a little, then. Don't need a glove."

The rider of the pinto began tossing the pill to the Yearling leader. Although lobbing the ball, he threw with grace and an easy motion which hinted at experience.

"Who is he—one of the pitchers?" queried Bee Brand, looking over the stranger.

"Never saw him before, and don't think Jack has," I respond.

The newcomer now speeded up. The ball spanked into Jack's big mitt.

"Say, that maverick has all kinds of smoke!" remarks Gig Sims. "Jack framing on us? Trying to introduce a new twirler in spectacular fashion, or what? Up this galoot rides on his pinto, gets off, and immediately begins to show class. I have my suspicions!"

"Listen!" I tell him.

Jack Brand, his face beaming, speaks.

"Brother, you can chuck that onion. You've pitched before, I'm telling the world!"

"I allow I've throwed some," admits the stranger. "Here's one I used to handle fair to middling."

He drew on his saliva supply to moisten the ball, wound up, and let her go. The pill seemed to stop suddenly when it neared Jack, and slanted down into his glove. Several times the stranger repeated this stunt.

Jack Brand glowed.

"What a peach of a spitter!" he cries. "Say, how long are you going to be in town? You're the answer to a prayer!"

"I allow he's a pitcher, all right," draws Gig Sims.

Bee Brand had been following the newcomer's work with steadily increasing interest. Her pretty eyes were puzzled.

"It seems to me I—" she says, and checks herself.

The whole crowd was gathered around Jack and the pinto's rider now.

"I ain't much to linger, partner," the latter was saying. "I'm a roamer. I was just passing through, and I wanted to throw a bit. Never can resist the temptation, even though I ain't playing ball no more; but I reckon I'll have to move on."

"We need an extra pitcher for a big game to-morrow," Jack expostulates. "If it's money you want, I think—"

"Never got money for playing ball. Never wanted to. No, I'm bound for the hills."

All this failed to appeal to Lefty Cann. He flares up now.

"What's the matter with me? Ain't I going to pitch to-morrow? What do you want of this hombre?"

"In case anything happens to you, Lefty—" Jack begins.

"Nothing's going to happen. My arm's fine," growls Lefty. "A fine howdydo this! Nice way to treat me!"

"That's just what I say," puts in Luke Yarrow.

"Lefty is the man we want to pitch," adds Duke.

The rider of the pinto gazed at the Yarrow's a moment. Then he gazed away.

"Who you playing to-morrow?" he queried.

"Rawhide Bend—annual game, and for blood. They've won for six years in a row."

"Too much!" The stranger comes to a decision. "I reckon I'll stick around for this game. If you need me, I'll pitch—provided you agree to one or two trifling conditions."

"What are they?" Jack demands.

"I'll tell you to-morrow. Got any hotels around here? I'll have to stay some place to-night."

"You can come out to my dad's ranch, as well as not. Lots of room, ain't there, Charley?"

"You bet!" I reply.

"That's settled then," asserts Bill Brand's son. "And now, what's your name? I want you to meet my sister Bee, as long as we're going home together."

"Folks call me Slim," hesitates the stranger; "Slim Spears."

Jack introduced Spears to Bee.

"Haven't we met before somewhere, Mr. Spears?" asks the girl.

"If we had, I certainly should remember it," he answers.

Bee smiled kind of funny, but said no more.

On the way home Jack Brand confides to me:

"I don't know where this chap blew from, but he can pitch ball, Charley! You know, I had a hunch when he came riding up and wanted to play catch. He seems to be in shape, too. I'm starting Lefty to-morrow, but the moment that old fork-hander weakens out he comes!"

"Never saw this hombre before, then, Jack?"

"Not me; but I'm sure glad he roamed into Yearling City this evening."

III

SLIM SPEARS was polite and pleasant around the ranch; still, he showed no great yearning to talk about himself. The following morning, before I went into town, I noticed Bee Brand attempting to put over that sweet feminine line of third degree which is so dangerous. However, Bee seemed to be making dog-gone little headway with it.

From dawn that day, I reckon, Yearling City had no thought for anything but baseball. Rawhide Bend rooters were riding and driving in, and all kinds of iron men were being bet.

The Yarrow brothers were peeved on Lefty's account, I heard. They were growling that he shouldn't be shunted aside for a stranger—though, as yet, he hadn't been.

It also leaked to my ears that the veteran southpaw had been lifting a few small glasses at the Last Whoop and Two-Finger Ted's, and the stuff they sell in them places would never do to wash your face in. I saw Lefty about noontime, and he looked tough.

By two o'clock all of Yearling City and most of Rawhide Bend was present at the ball grounds. Our diamond is kind of bumpy and crude. There ain't no fences, and the only seats is benches for the players; but that makes no matter to anybody attending the annual scrap. They're most too excited to sit or stand still, once the game gets under way.

Slim Spears, the newcomer, jogged in from the ranch with the Brand family. He still rode his rangy pinto, and was wearing his khaki and the hardware on his hip.

"You better warm up well," I overhear Jack tell him. "Lefty is liable to blow in the first frame, and I want you ready."

"I allow I'll help, if possible," smiles Spears. "You'll recollect, though, there's a couple of conditions I mentioned last night."

"Yes, I remember. What are they, Slim?"

"Well, first, I'm going in the box just the way I am—and wearing my iron goods here."

He taps his six-shooter.

Jack frowns.

"Why? It 'll handicap your throwing, and—"

"No, it won't bother me—not near as much as I'll be bothered without it. If I pitch, I got to have the gun handy."

Jack shrugs his shoulders.

"You're a queer one, Slim! However, if you promise not to shoot the umpire, I guess they'll let you have your way. Any other conditions?"

"I reckon not, now. Only don't hold it against me if I ain't able to last out the whole game, Mr. Brand."

"What do you mean by that? Your arm not—"

"I reckon the arm will be fair to middling; but so many funny things can happen to a hombre's plans these days."

"You are a card, Slim," says Jack.

"You sure are a card!"

"Mebbe that's so," Slim Spears agrees, with a grin.

The Yearling leader went to warm up with Lefty and the stranger, and Gig Sims strolled my way.

"If we lose this tussle I ain't eating steaks for a long, long time," he informs me. "Think that new fellow can pitch in a game?"

"Jack appears to," I answer.

"Uhuh! Well, he ought to know. By the way, a couple of Rawhide Bend galoots was telling me that a lone bandit cleaned out the office of the Vesper Mine, back in the hills, two or three nights ago—some lone hand with a flock of nerve."

"So?" I utters carelessly.

"Uhuh! I was just wondering—"

The marshal's eyes narrow. I had a hunch as to what he was wondering. His wonder might have been increased did he but know the conditions Slim Spears had laid down to Jack Brand. This newcomer was an odd pilgrim—and you never can tell about that kind.

However, I said nothing to my friend Sims just then.

IV

THE game was called by Sheriff Coates of Vesper County, who acted as umpire, at half past two. Lefty Cann ambled out on the slab for the Yearlings, and a ton of noise busted forth.

Duke and Luke Yarrow, both of them slightly alcoholic, yelled with approval at sight of Lefty on the slab. Idly I speculated how much money they had bet. Them brothers was loud talkers, but the loud mavericks don't always live up to their boasts.

Slim Spears was not in the line-up. He was leaning against his pinto, which he had fastened to a stump not far from third base.

Old Lefty had a vicious look on his seamed face as the first Rawhide Bend hitter stepped up to the plate. The veteran proceeded to strike him out in jig time.

One, two, three, the enemy went out in the first inning, all of 'em breezing the air. How us Yearling backers howled!

A husky six-footer was tossing for Rawhide Bend, and he proved pretty skookum himself. Not a Yearling saw first base in our half.

I joined old Bill Brand and his daughter in the crowd back of the plate.

"Oh, I'm all excited, Uncle Charley!" cries Bee. "I hope we score next inning! I did want to see Mr. Spears pitch, but Lefty is doing fine, isn't he?"

"So far—yes," I murmur.

In the second stanza just three batters again faced Cann. Two of them struck out.

"What's got into the old outlaw?" I ask.

"I'm afraid we'll not see Mr. Spears in action to-day," says Bee—kind of regretfully, I thought.

Jack Brand smacked out a hit in our half, but nobody else could, so the second chapter closed without a score.

Lefty Cann endeavored too hard to fan the first Rawhider batting in the third, and walked him instead. Right pronto and instantaneous came grief. The old southpaw had shot his wad. He lost everything, and Rawhide Bend fairly stampeded him out of the box. Before Slim Spears was rushed to the rescue five runs was in, and only one out.

Rawhide Bend couldn't do anything to our new hurler. Cool as a refrigerator, he forced two stickers to pop out, and the slaughter was over.

"That young hombre is all right," remarks old Bill Brand. "But do my aged eyes deceive me? Ain't he toting a gun on his hip? Going to shoot the batters, if he can't get 'em otherwise?"

"It may not be a bad idea," I observe. "A pitcher armed with six barrels and a spitter ought to win."

"He may not last any longer than Lefty," grunts the boss. "Lefty started good, too."

"Oh, he can pitch rings around Cann,"

suddenly comes from Bee. "I know I—if I could only think!"

Further talk ceased. Yearling City was putting on a little excitement in the final half of the third. Spears, batting in place of the canned Cann, slapped out a single, and Shorty Hooker took another. A drive by Jack Brand scored 'em both, and we did some hollering ourselves. Two runs was our portion for the inning, however.

Slim Spears thoroughly tamed Rawhide Bend in the fourth, and again in the fifth. His speed and that ornery spit ball had the visitors buffaloed.

In our half of the fifth some bad playing by the Rawhide infield gave us two more runs, and in the sixth, after Spears had turned them back as usual, Shorty Hooker drove everybody crazy by knocking out a home run and tying the score.

With the count five all, Slim Spears went out on the slab for the seventh frame. Before doing so, his eyes swept keenly over the crowd. I noticed this was a habit of his at the beginning of each inning. He seemed a little disturbed.

And his spitter wasn't so deceptive in the seventh. Three Rawhiders hit the pill hard, but the Yearlings was feeling fine. They fielded beautifully, and not a man reached first.

Jack Brand opened our part of the canto with a pretty two-bagger past third base.

"Reckon they make regular ball players out of kids at that there Princeton college, Bill," somebody says to the boss.

"Cornell, you mean. That's where I sent Jack," old Bill corrects.

"Princeton!" Bee Brand kind of gasps. "Princeton! That's it!"

I paid no more attention at the time, for the Yearlings had got another man on base through a walk. All us loyal rooters was roaring for a run.

Joe Bates beat out a bunt and filled the bases—and nobody out!

The Rawhide Bend six-footer grabbed hold of himself and pitched his arm off. Two men he fanned, and then Slim Spears picked up a bat.

As our spit-baller took his place at the plate, an explosion shattered the air. It issued from the direction of Yearling City. While every one was marveling, Slim Spears cracked a fast ball, and never was a pill driven farther on our grounds. The ball seemed to land a mile back of the outfielders.

Three runners scampered around to the plate. Slim Spears shot down first, tore second, and streaked third. Then, to the amazement of us all, he didn't make for the home plate, though he had ample and abundant time. Instead, he bounded through the crowd at the hot corner until he reached his pinto, flung himself into the saddle, and was off in the direction of Yearling City at a breakneck gallop.

This stunt certainly had me and everybody else gasping.

"What under the sun—" Bee Brand manages to get out.

More surprises were on the menu. Gig Sims was next with one. I hadn't seen the marshal in several innings, and now he came plunging our way.

"Come on, boys!" he yells. "We got to get to town. The bank and post office are being robbed! Did you hear that explosion? A gang of them are taking advantage of the ball game to clean out Yearling City, and they have confederates here! I learned—but not in time. We got to have a posse instant!"

"Sure of that, Sims?" demands Bill Brand.

Everybody is crowding around.

"You bet I'm sure! I think our precious friends the Yarrows are in the deal—and others!"

We recalled the strange action of Slim Spears, following the explosion and his long drive. The Yarrows weren't present. In fact, they had been missing for some time.

"That young hombre one of the band?" Bill Brand asks.

"I don't know. Shouldn't wonder," Sims retorts.

"I think you're all wrong!" asserts Bee, sort of angry.

But it was a time for action rather than argument. The ball game just naturally ceased. Those of us who had guns swarmed around Marshal Sims, and the entire throng hit out for Yearling City.

V

BARELY had we started when the sound of rapid shooting assailed our ears. In less than a minute there must have been a dozen revolver barks.

"Hurry, boys!" implores Gig Sims.

And I'll allow we did hurry; but when we finally struck the main stem, most of the excitement was over.

Near the post office and the adjoining

bank Slim Spears and his pinto were to be discerned. His left arm bleeding, and not altogether steady in the saddle, the late Yearling pitcher nevertheless was managing to keep covered two surly-looking mavericks who leaned against the bank wall. Two more lay groaning on the ground, several feet away.

One of the pair against the wall was Luke Yarrow. Duke was among the groaners.

"By golly, Spears must have stopped 'em!" cries Sims.

"Spears did his best," speaks up the lad on the pinto. "Two of them got away, but they haven't any start, marshal. However, we have the ringleaders here, and all the loot. If you'll be so good as to relieve me of them now? My other arm seems—"

Doc Sage, our only medico, and myself helped the pitcher off the horse, while Sims took the outlaws in charge.

"Just a flesh wound," pronounces doc. "Had a battle, huh?"

"Yes, quite a brisk little gun fight for a few moments. I was afraid I wouldn't arrive in time, but I did get here. The war was on pronto, and I reckon I shot a bit the best. The odds were against me; still, I was bound and determined to grab those Yarrow hombres at any cost. My own negligence—"

"Say, would you mind telling us who you really are?" Sims puts the query, coming over to us.

By this time old Bill and young Jack Brand, as well as daughter Bee, have reached the spot. An eager bunch awaits Spears's response; but before he can make it, Miss Bee speaks.

"I know you now, I think!" she accuses. "You masquerader, you! Aren't you Sperry Foster, the brother of Ann Foster, and didn't you pitch for Princeton last spring? I met you after a game you played. It never came to me until the seventh inning to-day. I had been trying to place you ever since last night. You are Sperry Foster!"

"I won't deny it, Miss Brand. I did meet you with Ann, and I'm sorry the circumstances have forced me to act a bit oddly." His words ain't so crude and unpolished now. "I suppose my get-up helped puzzle you. Rather a far cry from evening clothes!"

"I never got in any games against Princeton, or I might have recognized you

myself," says brother Jack. "I knew well enough that you were a real pitcher, anyway; but how come you to be so far West, and mixed up—"

"In this kind of business, eh?" finishes Mr. Spears-Foster. "Just fix this arm of mine a little, doc, while I try to roll away some of the surrounding mystery. I'm Sperry Foster, all right, and I did pitch for Princeton; but upon graduation I returned to the West—I'm a native, like you—and entered the service of Uncle Sam as a Federal officer. I can ride and shoot, and am fond of thrills. They made me what I am to-day. About a month ago a gang robbed a post office in Wyoming during a ball game. A couple of brothers, the Ridgetts, headed the gang. I was put on the case, and I decided to follow their trail in my own fashion. The said trail brought me to Yearling City, and last night, when I saw the Yarrows—well, I wondered if anything would happen."

"I got a couple of wires to-day, but my head was so full of baseball I didn't learn nothing until the last minute," puts in Gig Sims. "I always thought them Yarrows was funny mavericks. Them showing so much interest in the ball game, too, and hanging around Lefty Cann, and—"

"Don't you ever think I was in with them!" The old left-hander himself contributes this from the crowd. "I drank a little with them, and they said they were betting on me, but that's all I know."

"Of course! They wanted to make themselves solid in the town. I guess they

had a premonition when I arrived last night. Maybe I forced their hand to-day, though I think it was planned in advance to take advantage of everybody's absence," goes on Spears. "I never ought to have played ball, but I couldn't resist the temptation. The old fever crept over me, and I had to get in. It's my first game this summer. I should have been watching the Yarrows every minute, but I thought that if I kept on the alert, and armed, and ready to go, it would be all right. So it was—but it nearly wasn't!"

"That's why you made conditions, such as packing your artillery during the contest, and so forth?" grins Jack.

"Yes. Well, it ended luckily, considering everything. By the way, who wins that game? It's unfinished."

"Your hit in the seventh put us three runs to the good, even if they call you out, and we batted last. I reckon Rawhide Bend won't argue about paying the bets, under the circumstances."

And those pilgrims didn't, I may add. I don't know as they could.

Bee Brand now had something more to say.

"You must come out to the ranch while your arm is getting well, Sperry Foster. You are Ann's brother, you know. I think Mr. Sims will guard your prisoners for you. Besides, I'm an awfully good nurse—ain't I, dad?"

But I could see old Bill Brand didn't have to recommend her to insure young Mr. Foster's acceptance of the invite.

THE FAIRY HILL

I KNOW a green and daisied hill
Where a girl's face lies smiling, still.
There is no lovelier than she
From land to land, from sea to sea.

Night and day her long hair grows
About the roots of the wild rose;
And though fast shut are her blue eyes,
'Tis plain she dreams of Paradise.

So white her bosom is, the moon
Steals soft, with little silver shoon,
To gaze on it; and I shall lay
My head down on it there some day—
When I am done with earthly things,
Gathered to the old queens and kings.

Andrew McIver Adams

The Girl from Hollywood

A MODERN DRAMA OF CITY AND COUNTRY LIFE IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

By Edgar Rice Burroughs

Author of "Tarzan of the Apes," "A Princess of Mars," etc.

XX

THE pock-marked Mexican stepped close to Shannon and took hold of her bridle reins.

"You think," he said in broken English, "we are damn fool? If you do not come from Allen, you come for no good to us. You tell us the truth, damn quick, or you never go back to tell where you find us and bring policemen here!"

His tone was ugly and his manner threatening.

There was no harm in telling these men the truth, though it was doubtful whether they would believe her. She realized that she was in a predicament from which it might not be easy to extricate herself. She had told them that she was alone, and if they suspected her motives they might easily do away with her. She knew how lightly the criminal Mexican esteems life—especially the life of the hated gringo.

"I have come to warn you because a friend of mine is going to watch for you next Friday night. He does not know who you are, or what you bring out of the hills. I do, and so I know that rather than be caught you might kill him, and I do not want him killed. That is all."

"How do you know what we bring out of the hills?"

"Allen told me."

"Allen told you? I do not believe you. Do you know where Allen is?"

"He is in jail in Los Angeles. I heard him telling a man in Los Angeles last July."

"Who is the friend of yours that is going to watch for us?"

"Mr. Pennington."

"You have told him about us?"

"I have told you that he knows nothing about you. All he knows is that some one comes down with burros from the hills, and that they cut his fence last Friday night. He wants to catch you and find out what you are doing."

"Why have you not told him?"

She hesitated.

"That can make no difference," she said presently.

"It makes a difference to us. I told you to tell the truth, or—"

The Mexican raised his rifle that she might guess the rest.

"I did not want to have to explain how I knew about you. I did not want Mr. Pennington to know that I knew such men as Allen."

"How did you know Allen?"

"That has nothing to do with it at all. I have warned you so that you can take steps to avoid discovery and capture. I shall tell no one else about you. Now let me go."

She gathered Baldy and tried to rein him about, but the man clung to her bridle.

"Not so much of a hurry, *señorita*! Unless I know how Allen told you so much, I cannot believe that he told you anything. The police have many ways of learning things—sometimes they use women. If you are a friend to Allen, all right. If you are not, you know too damn much for to be very good for your health. You had better tell me all the truth, or you shall not ride away from here—ever!"

"Very well," she said. "I met Allen in a house in Hollywood where he sold his 'snow,' and I heard him telling the man there how you disposed of the whisky that was stolen in New York, brought here to

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the coast in a ship, and hidden in the mountains."

"What is the name of the man in whose house you met Allen?"

"Crumb."

The man raised his heavy brows.

"How long since you been there—in that house in Hollywood?"

"Not since the last of July. I left the house the same time Allen did."

"You know how Allen he get in jail?"

The girl saw that a new suspicion had been aroused in the man, and she judged that the safer plan was to be perfectly frank.

"I do not know, for I have seen neither Crumb nor Allen since; but when I read in the paper that he had been arrested that night, I guessed that Crumb had done it. I heard Crumb ask him to deliver some snow to a man in Hollywood. I know that Crumb is a bad man, and that he was trying to steal your share of the money from Allen."

The man thought in silence for several minutes, the lines of his heavy face evidencing the travail with which some new idea was being born. Presently he looked up, the light of cunning gleaming in his evil eyes.

"You go now," he said. "I know you! Allen tell me about you a long time ago. You Crumb's woman, and your name is Gaza. You will not tell anything about us to your rich friends the Penningtons—you bet you won't!"

The Mexican laughed loudly, winking at his companions.

Shannon could feel the burning flush that suffused her face. She closed her eyes in what was almost physical pain, so terribly did the humiliation torture her pride, and then came the nausea of disgust. The man had dropped her reins, and she wheeled Baldy about.

"You will not come Friday night?" she asked, wishing some assurance that her sacrifice had not been entirely unavailing.

"Mr. Pennington will not find us Friday night, and so he will not be shot."

She rode away then; but there was a vague suspicion lurking in her mind that there had been a double meaning in the man's final words.

Custer Pennington, occupied in the office for a couple of hours after lunch, had just come from the house, and was standing on the brow of the hill looking out over the

ranch toward the mountains. His gaze, wandering idly at first, was suddenly riveted upon a tiny speck moving downward from the mouth of a distant ravine—a moving speck which he recognized, even at that distance, to be a horseman, where no horseman should have been. For a moment he watched it, and then, returning to the house, he brought out a pair of binoculars.

Now the speck had disappeared; but he knew that it was down in the bottom of the basin, hidden by the ridge above Jackknife Cañon, and he waited for the time when it would reappear on the crest. For five, ten, fifteen minutes he watched the spot where the rider should come into view once more. Then he saw a movement in the brush and leveled his glasses upon the spot, following the half seen figure until it emerged into a space clear of chaparral. Now they were clearly revealed by the powerful lenses, the horse and its rider—Baldy and Shannon!

Pennington dropped the glasses at his side, a puzzled expression on his face, as he tried to find some explanation of the fact that the binoculars had revealed. From time to time he caught glimpses of her again as she rode down the cañon; but when, after a considerable time, she did not emerge upon the road leading to the house, he guessed that she had crossed over El Camino Corto. Why she should do this he could not even conjecture. It was entirely out of her way, and a hilly trail, while the other was a wagon road leading almost directly from Sycamore to her house.

Presently he walked around the house to the north side of the hill, where he had a view of the valley spreading to the east and the west and the north. Toward the west he could see the road that ran above the Evanses' house all the way to Horse Camp Cañon.

He did not know why he stood there watching for Shannon. It was none of his affair where she rode, or when. It seemed strange, though, that she should have ridden alone into the hills after having refused to ride with him. It surprised him, and troubled him, too, for it was the first suggestion that Shannon could commit even the most trivial act of underhandedness.

After a while he saw her emerge from Horse Camp Cañon and follow the road to her own place. Custer ran his fingers through his hair in perplexity. He was troubled not only because Shannon had ridden without him, after telling him that

she could not ride that afternoon, but also because of the direction in which she had ridden—the trail of which he had told her that he thought if led to the solution of the mystery of the nocturnal traffic. He had told her that he would not ride it before Saturday, for fear of arousing the suspicions of the men he wished to surprise in whatever activity they might be engaged upon; and within a few hours she had ridden deliberately up into the mountains on that very trail.

The more Custer considered the matter, the more perplexed he became. At last he gave it up in sheer disgust. Doubtless Shannon would tell him all about it when he called for her later in the afternoon. He tried to forget it; but the thing would not be forgotten.

Several times he realized, with surprise, that he was hurt because she had ridden without him. He tried to argue that he was not hurt, that it made no difference to him, that she had a perfect right to ride with or without him as she saw fit, and that he did not care a straw one way or the other.

No, it was not that that was troubling him—it was something else. He didn't know what it was, but a drink would straighten it out; so he took a drink. He realized that it was the first he had had in a week, and almost decided not to take it; but he changed his mind. After that he took several more without bothering his conscience to any appreciable extent. When his conscience showed signs of life, he reasoned it back to innocuous desuetude by that unanswerable argument:

"What's the use?"

By the time he left to call for Shannon he was miserably happy and happily miserable; yet he showed no outward sign that he had been drinking, unless it was that he swung the roadster around the curves of the driveway leading down the hill a bit more rapidly than usual.

Shannon was ready and waiting for him. She came out to the car with a smile—a smile that hid a sad and frightened heart; and he greeted her with another that equally belied his inward feelings. As they rode up to the castle on the hill, he gave her every opportunity to mention and explain her ride, principally by long silences, though never by any outward indication that he thought she had ought to explain. If she did not care to have him know about it,

she should never know from him that he already knew; but the canker of suspicion was already gnawing at his heart, and he was realizing, perhaps for the first time, how very desirable this new friendship had grown to be.

Again and again he insisted to himself that what she had done made no difference—that she must have had some excellent reason. Perhaps she had just wanted to be alone. He often had experienced a similar longing. Even when Grace had been there, he had occasionally wanted to ride off into the hills with nothing but his own thoughts for company.

Yet, argue as he would, the fact remained that it had made a difference, and that he was considering Shannon now in a new light. Just what the change meant he probably could not have satisfactorily explained, had he tried; but he did not try. He knew that there was a difference, and that his heart ached when it should not ache. It made him angry with himself, with the result that he went to his room and had another drink.

Shannon, too, felt the difference. She thought that it was her own guilty conscience, though why she should feel guilt for having risked so much for his sake she did not know. Instinctively she was honest, and so to deceive one whom she loved, even for a good purpose, troubled her.

Something else troubled her, too. She knew that Custer had been drinking again, and she recalled what he had said to her, that morning, of the help she had been to him in getting away from his habit. She knew too well herself what it meant to fight for freedom from a settled vice, and she had been glad to have been instrumental in aiding him. She had had to fight her own battle alone; she did not want him to face a similar ordeal.

She wondered why he had been drinking that afternoon. Could it have been because she had not been able to ride with him, and thus left alone he had reverted to the old habit? The girl reproached herself, even though she felt, after her interview with the Mexicans, that she had undoubtedly saved Custer's life.

The Evanses, mother and son, were also at the Penningtons' for dinner that night. Shannon had noticed that it was with decreasing frequency that Grace's name was mentioned of late. She knew the reason. Letters had become fewer and fewer from

the absent girl. She had practically ceased writing to Custer. Her letters to Mrs. Evans were no longer read to the Penningtons, for there had crept into them a new and unpleasant note that was as foreign as possible to the girl who had gone away months before. They showed a certain carelessness and lack of consideration that had pained them all.

They always asked after the absent girl, but her present life and her career were no longer discussed, since the subject brought nothing but sorrow to them all. That she had been disappointed and disillusioned seemed probable, since she had obtained only a few minor parts in mediocre pictures; and now she no longer mentioned her ambition, and scarcely ever wrote of her work.

At dinner that night Eva was unusually quiet until the colonel, noticing it, asked if she was ill.

"There!" she cried. "You all make life miserable for me because I talk too much, and then, when I give you a rest, you ask if I am ill. What shall I do? If I talk, I pain you. If I fail to talk, I pain you; but if you must know, I am too thrilled to talk just now—I am going to be married!"

"All alone?" inquired Custer.

A sickly purplish hue, threatening crimson complications, crept from beneath Guy's collar and enveloped his entire head. He reached for his water goblet and ran the handle of his fork up his sleeve. The ensuing disentanglement added nothing to his equanimity, though it all but overturned the goblet. Custer was eying him with a seraphic expression that boded ill.

"What's the matter, Guy—measles?" he asked with a beatific smile.

Guy grinned sheepishly, and was about to venture an explanation when Eva interrupted him. The others at the table were watching the two with amused smiles.

"You see, momsy," said Eva, addressing her mother, "Guy has sold a story. He got a thousand dollars for it."

"Oh, not a thousand!" expostulated Guy.

"Well, it was nearly a thousand—if it had been three hundred dollars more it would have been—and so now that our future is assured we are going to be married. I hadn't intended to mention it until Guy had talked with popsy, but this will be very much nicer, and easier for Guy."

Guy looked up appealingly at the colonel. "You see, sir, I was summing to key you—I mean I was—"

"You see what it is going to mean to have an author in the family," said Custer. "He's going to talk away above our heads. We won't know what he's talking about half the time. I don't now. Do you, Guy?"

"For pity's sake, Custer, leave the boy alone!" laughed Mrs. Pennington. "You're enough to rattle a stone image. And now, Guy, you know you don't have to feel embarrassed. We have all grown accustomed to the idea that you and Eva would marry, so it is no surprise. It makes us very happy."

"Thank you, Mrs. Pennington," said the boy. "It wasn't that it was hard to tell you. It was the way Eva wanted me to do it—like a book. I was supposed to come and ask the colonel for her hand in a very formal manner, and it made me feel foolish, the more I thought of it—and I have been thinking about it all day. So, you see, when Eva blurted it out, I thought of my silly speech."

"It wasn't a silly speech," interrupted Eva. "It was simplimetic gorgestic. You thought so yourself when you made *Bruce Bellinghame* ask *Hortense's* father for her. '*Mr. Le Claire*,' he said, squaring his manly shoulders, 'it is with emotions of deepest solemnity and a full realization of my unworthiness that I approach you upon this beautiful day in May—'"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, Eva, please!" begged Guy.

They were all laughing now, including Eva and Guy. The tears were rolling down Custer's cheeks.

"That editor was guilty of grand larceny when he offered you seven hundred berries for the story. Why, the gem alone is easily worth a thousand. Adieu, Mark Twain! Farewell, Bill Nye! You've got 'em all nailed to the post, Guy Thackeray!"

The colonel wiped his eyes.

"I gather," he said, "that you two children wish to get married. Do I surmise correctly?"

"Oh, popsy, you're just wonderful!" exclaimed Eva.

"Yes, how did you guess it, father?" asked Custer. "Marvelous deductive faculties for an old gentleman, I'll say!"

"That will be about all from you, Custer," admonished the colonel.

"Any time that I let a chance like this slip!" returned young Pennington. "Do you think I have forgotten how those two imps pestered the life out of Grace and me a few short years ago? Nay, nay!"

"I don't blame Custer a bit," said Mrs. Evans. "Guy and Eva certainly did make life miserable for him and Grace."

"That part of it is all right—it is Guy's affair and Eva's; but did you hear him refer to me as an old gentleman?"

They all laughed.

"But you *are* a gentleman," insisted Custer.

The colonel, his eyes twinkling, turned to Mrs. Evans.

"Times have changed, Mae, since we were children. Imagine speaking thus to our fathers!"

"I'm glad they have changed, Custer. It's terrible to see children afraid of their parents. It has driven so many of them away from home."

"No danger of that here," said the colonel.

"It is more likely to be the other way around," suggested Mrs. Pennington. "In the future we may hear of parents leaving home because of the exacting tyranny of their children."

"My children shall be brought up properly," announced Eva, "with proper respect for their elders."

"Guided by the shining example of their mother," said Custer.

"And their Uncle Cutie," she retorted.

"Come, now," interrupted the colonel, "let's hear something about your plans. When are you going to be married?"

"Yes," offered Custer. "Now that the seven hundred dollars has assured their future, there is no reason why they shouldn't be married at once and take a suite at the Ambassador. I understand they're as low as thirty-five hundred a month."

"Aw, I have more than the seven hundred," said Guy. "I've been saving up for a long time. We'll have plenty to start with."

Shannon noticed that he flushed just a little as he made the statement, and she alone knew why he flushed. It was too bad that Custer's little sister should start her married life on money of that sort!

Shannon felt that at heart Guy was a good boy—that he must have been led into this traffic originally without any adequate realization of its criminality. Her own

misfortune had made her generously ready to seek excuses for wrong-doing in others; but she dreaded to think what it was going to mean to Eva and the other Penningtons if ever the truth became known. From her knowledge of the sort of men with whom Guy was involved, she was inclined to believe that the menace of exposure or blackmail would hang over him for many years, even if the former did not materialize in the near future; for she was confident that if his confederates were discovered by the authorities, they would immediately involve him, and would try to put the full burden of responsibility upon his shoulders.

"I don't want the financial end of matrimony to worry either of you," the colonel was saying. "Guy has chosen a profession in which it may require years of effort to produce substantial returns. All I shall ask of my daughter's husband is that he shall honestly apply himself to his work. If you do your best, Guy, you will succeed, and in the meantime I'll take care of the finances."

"But we don't want it that way," said Eva. "We don't want to live on charity."

"Do you think that what I give to my little girl would be given in a spirit of charity?" the colonel asked.

"Oh, popsy, I know you wouldn't feel that it was; but can't you see how Guy would feel? I want him to be independent. I'd rather get along with a little, and feel that he had earned it all."

"It may take a long time, Eva," said Custer; "and in the meantime the best part of your lives would be spent in worry and scrimping. I know how you feel; but there's a way around it that has the backing of established business methods. Let father finance Guy's writing ability, just as inventive genius is sometimes financed. When Guy succeeds, he can pay back with interest."

"What a dapper little thought!" exclaimed the girl. "That would fix everything, wouldn't it? You radiant man!"

XXI

ON the following Monday a pock-marked Mexican appeared at the county jail in Los Angeles, during visitors' hours, and asked to be permitted to see Slick Allen. The two stood in a corner and conversed in whispers. Allen's face wore an ugly scowl when his visitor told him of young Pennington's interference with their plans.

"It's getting too hot for us around there," said Allen. "We got to move. How much junk you got left?"

"About sixty cases of booze. We got rid of nearly three hundred cases on the coast side, without sending 'em through Evans. There isn't much of the other junk left—a couple pounds altogether, at the outside."

"We got to lose the last of the booze," said Allen; "but we'll get our money's worth out of it. Now you listen, and listen careful, Bartolo."

He proceeded very carefully and explicitly to explain the details of a plan which brought a grin of sinister amusement to the face of the Mexican. It was not an entirely new plan, but rather an elaboration and improvement of one that Allen had conceived some time before in the event of a contingency similar to that which had now arisen.

"And what about the girl?" asked Bartolo. "She should pay well to keep the Penningtons from knowing."

"Leave her to me," replied Allen. "I shall not be in jail forever."

During the ensuing days of that late September week, when Shannon and Custer rode together, there was a certain constraint in their relations that was new and depressing. The girl was apprehensive of the outcome of his adventure on the rapidly approaching Friday, while he could not rid himself of the haunting memory of her solitary and clandestine ride over the mysterious trail that led into the mountains.

It troubled him that she should have kept the thing a secret, and it troubled him that he should care. What difference could it make to him where Shannon Burke rode? He asked himself that question a hundred times; but though he always answered that it could make no difference, he knew perfectly well that it *had* made a difference.

He often found himself studying her face, as if he would find there either an answer to his question, or a refutation of the suspicion of trickery and deceit which had arisen in his mind and would not down. What a beautiful face it was—not despite its irregular features, but because of them, and because of the character and individuality they imparted to her appearance. Custer could not look upon that face and doubt her.

Several times she caught him in the act of scrutinizing her thus, and she wondered

at it, for in the past he had never appeared to be consciously studying her. She was aware, too, that he was troubled about something. She wished that she might ask him—that she might invite his confidence, for she knew the pain of unshared sorrows; but he gave her no opening. So they rode together, often in silence; and though their stirrups touched many a time, yet constantly they rode farther and farther apart, just because chance had brought Custer Pennington from the office that Saturday afternoon to look out over the southern hills at the moment when Shannon had ridden down the trail into the meadow above Jack-knife Cañon.

At last Friday came. Neither had reverted, since the previous Saturday, to the subject that was uppermost in the mind of each; but now Shannon could not refrain from seeking once more to deter Custer from his project. She had not been able to forget the sinister smile of the Mexican, or to rid her mind of an intuitive conviction that the man's final statement had concealed a hidden threat.

They were parting at the fork of the road—she had hesitated until the last moment.

"You still intend to try to catch those men to-night?" she asked.

"Yes—why?"

"I had hoped you would give it up. I am afraid something may happen. I—oh, please don't go, Custer!" She wished that she might add: "For my sake."

He laughed shortly.

"I guess there won't be any trouble. If there is, I can take care of myself."

She saw that it was useless to insist further.

"Let me know if everything is all right," she asked. "Light the light in the big cupola on the house when you get back—I can see it from my bedroom window—and then I shall know that nothing has happened. I shall be watching for it."

"All right," Custer promised, and they parted.

He wondered why she should be so perturbed about his plans for the night. There was something peculiar about that—something that he couldn't understand or explain, except in accordance with a single hypothesis—a hypothesis which he scorned to consider, yet which rode his thoughts like a veritable *Little Old Man of the Sea*. Had he known the truth, it would all have

been quite understandable; but how was he to know that Shannon Burke loved him?

When he reached the house, the ranch bookkeeper came to tell him that the Los Angeles operator had been trying to get him all afternoon.

"Somebody in L. A. wants to talk to you on important business," said the bookkeeper. "You're to call back the minute you get here."

Five minutes later he had his connection. An unfamiliar voice asked if he were the younger Mr. Pennington.

"I am," he replied.

"Some one cut your fence last Friday. You like to know who he is?"

"What about it? Who are you?"

"Never mind who I am. I was with them. They double-crossed me. You want to catch 'em?"

"I want to know who they are, and why they cut my fence, and what the devil they're up to back there in the hills."

"You listen to me. You *sabe* Jackknife Cañon?"

"Yes."

"To-night they bring down the load just before dark. They do that every Friday, and hide the burros until very late. Then they come down into the valley while every one is asleep. To-night they hide 'em in Jackknife. They tie 'em there an' go away. About ten o'clock they come back. You be there nine o'clock, and you catch 'em when they come back. *Sabe?*"

"How many of 'em are there?"

"Only two. You don't have to be afraid—they don't pack no guns. You take gun an' you catch 'em all alone."

"But how do I know that you're not stringing me?"

"You listen. They double-cross me. I get even. You no want to catch 'em, I no care—that's all. Good-by!"

Custer turned away from the phone, running his fingers through his hair in a characteristic gesture signifying perplexity. What should he do? The message sounded rather fishy, he thought; but it would do no harm to have a look into Jackknife Cañon around nine o'clock. If he was being tricked, the worst he could fear was that they had taken this method of luring him to Jackknife while they brought the loaded burros down from the hills by some other route. If they had done that, it was very clever of them; but he would not be fooled a second time.

Custer Pennington didn't care to be laughed at, and so, if he was going to be hoaxed that night, he had no intention of having a witness to his idiocy. For that reason he did not take Jake with him, but rode alone up Sycamore when all the inmates of the castle on the hill thought him in bed and asleep. It was a clear night. Objects were plainly discernible at short distances, and when he passed the horse pasture he saw the dim bulks of the brood mares a hundred yards away. A coyote voiced its uncanny cry from a near hill. An owl hooted dismally from a distance; but these sounds, rather than depressing him, had the opposite effect, for they were of the voices of the nights that he had known and loved since childhood.

When he turned into Jackknife, he reined the Apache in and sat for a moment listening. From farther up the cañon, out of sight, there came the shadow of a sound. That would be the tethered burros, he thought, if the whole thing was not a trick; but he was certain that he heard the sound of something moving there.

He rode on again, but he took the precaution of loosening his gun in its holster. There was, of course, the bare possibility of a sinister motive behind the message he had received. As he thought of it now, it occurred to him that his informant was perhaps a trifle too insistent in assuring him that it was safe to come up here alone. Well, the man had put it over cleverly, if that had been his intent.

Now Custer saw a dark mass beneath a sycamore. He rode directly toward it, and in another moment he saw that it represented half a dozen laden burros tethered to the tree. He moved the Apache close in to them. There was no sign of men about.

He examined the packs, leaning over and feeling one. What they contained he could not guess; but it was not firewood. They evidently consisted of six wooden boxes to each burro, three on a side.

He reined the Apache in behind the burros in the darkness of the tree's shade, and there he waited for the coming of the men. He did not like the look of things at all. What could those boxes contain? There was no legitimate traffic through or out of those hills that could explain the weekly trip of this little pack train; and if the men in charge of it were employed in any illegitimate traffic, they would not be surrendering to a lone man as meekly as his in-

formant had suggested. The days of smuggling through the hills from the ocean was over—or at least Custer had thought it was over; but this thing commenced to look like a recrudescence of the old-time commerce.

As he sat there waiting, he had ample time to think. He speculated upon the identity and purpose of the mysterious informant who had called him up from Los Angeles. He speculated again upon the contents of the packs. He recalled the whisky that Guy had sold him from time to time, and wondered if the packs might not contain liquor. He had gathered from Guy that his supply came from Los Angeles, and he had never given the matter a second thought; but now he recalled the fact, and concluded that if this was whisky, it was not from the same source as Guy's.

All the time he kept thinking of Shannon and her mysterious excursion into the hills. He recalled her anxiety to prevent him from coming up here to-night, and he tried to find reasonable explanations for it. Of course, it was the obvious explanation that did not occur to him; but several did occur that he tried to put from his mind.

Then from the mouth of Jackknife he heard the sound of horses' hoofs. The Apache pricked up his ears, and Custer leaned forward and laid a hand upon his nostrils.

"Quiet, boy!" he admonished, in a low whisper.

The sounds approached slowly, halting occasionally. Presently two horsemen rode directly past him on the far side of the cañon. They rode at a brisk trot. Apparently they did not see the pack train, or, if they saw it, they paid no attention to it. They disappeared in the darkness, and the sound of their horses' hoofs ceased. Pennington knew that they had halted. Who could they be? Certainly not the drivers of the pack train, else they would have stopped with the burros.

He listened intently. Presently he heard horses walking slowly toward him from up the cañon. The two who had passed were coming back—stealthily.

"I sure have got myself in a pretty trap!" he soliloquized a moment later, when he heard the movement of mounted men in the cañon below him.

He drew his gun and sat waiting. It was not long that he had to wait. A voice coming from a short distance down the cañon addressed him.

"Ride out into the open and hold up your hands!" it said. "We got you surrounded and covered. If you make a break, we'll bore you. Come on, now, step lively—and keep your hands up!"

It was the voice of an American.

"Who in thunder are you?" demanded Pennington.

"I am a United States marshal," was the quick reply.

Pennington laughed. There was something convincing in the very tone of the man's voice—possibly because Custer had been expecting to meet Mexicans. Here was a hoax indeed; but evidently as much on the newcomers as on himself. They had expected to find a lawbreaker. They would doubtless be angry when they discovered that they had been duped.

Custer rode slowly out from beneath the tree.

"Hold up your hands, Mr. Pennington!" snapped the marshal.

Custer Pennington was nonplused. They knew who he was, and yet they demanded that he should hold up his hands like a common criminal.

"Hold on there!" he cried. "What's the joke? If you know who I am, what do you want me to hold up my hands for? How do I know you're a marshal?"

"You don't know it; but I know that you're armed, and that you're in a mighty bad hole. I don't know what you might do, and I ain't taking no chances. So stick 'em up, and do it quick. If anybody's going to get bored around here it'll be you, and not none of my men!"

"You're a damned fool," said Pennington succinctly; but he held his hands before his shoulders, as he had been directed.

Five men rode from the shadows and surrounded him. One of them dismounted and disarmed him. He lowered his hands and looked about at them.

"Would you mind," he said, "showing me your authority for this, and telling me what in hell it's all about?"

One of the men threw back his coat, revealing a badge.

"That's my authority," he said; "that, and the goods we got on you."

"What goods?"

"Well, we expect to get 'em when we examine those packs."

"Look here!" said Custer. "You're all wrong. I have nothing to do with that pack train or what it's packing. I came up

here to catch the fellows who have been bringing it down through Ganado every Friday night, and who cut our fence last week. I don't know any more about what's in those packs than you do—evidently not as much."

"That's all right, Mr. Pennington. You'll probably get a chance to tell all that to a jury. We been laying for you since last spring. We didn't know it was you until one of your gang squealed; but we knew that this stuff was somewhere in the hills above L. A., and we aimed to get it and you sooner or later."

"Me?"

"Well, not you particularly, but whoever was bootlegging it. To tell you the truth, I'm plumb surprised to find who it is. I thought all along it was some gang of cheap greasers; but it don't make no difference who it is to your Uncle Sam."

"You say some one told you it was I?" asked Custer.

"Sure! How else would we know it? It don't pay to double-cross your pals, Mr. Pennington."

"What are you going to do with me?" he asked.

"We're going to take you back to L. A. and get you held to the Federal grand jury."

"To-night?"

"We're going to take you back to-night."

"Can I stop at the house first?"

"No. We got a warrant to search the place, and we're going to leave a couple of my men here to do it the first thing in the morning. I got an idea you ain't the only one around there that knows something about this business."

As they talked, one of the deputies had taken a case from a pack and opened it.

"Look here!" he called. "It's it, all right!"

"It's what?" asked Custer.

"Oh, pe-ru-na, of course!" replied the deputy facetiously. "What did you think it was? I hope you never thought it none of that hootch stolen from a government bonded warehouse in Noo York!"

The others laughed at his joke.

"It's too bad," said the marshal, not at all unkindly, "for a decent young fellow like you to get mixed up in a nasty business like this."

"I agree with you," said Pennington.

His mind traveled like lightning, flashing a picture of Shannon Burke riding out of

the hills and across the meadow above Jackknife Cañon; of her inquiry that very afternoon as to whether he was coming up here to-night. Had she really wished to dissuade him, or had she only desired to make sure of his intentions? The light would not shine from the big cupola to-night. What message would the darkness carry to Shannon Burke?

XXII

THEY took Custer down to the village of Ganado, where they had left their cars and obtained horses. Here they left the animals, including the Apache, with instructions that he should be returned to the Rancho del Ganado in the morning.

The inhabitants of the village, almost to a man, had grown up in neighborly friendship with the Penningtons. When he from whom the officers had obtained their mounts discovered the identity of the prisoner, his surprise was exceeded only by his anger.

"If I'd known who you was after," he said, "you'd never have got no horses from me. I'd 'a' hamstrung 'em first! I've known Cus Pennington since he was knee high to a grasshopper, and whatever you took him for he never done it. Wait till the colonel hears of this. You won't have no more job than a jack rabbit!"

The marshal turned threateningly toward the speaker.

"Shut up!" he advised. "If Colonel Pennington hears of this before morning, you'll wish to God you was a jack rabbit, and could get out of the country in two jumps! Now you get what I'm telling you—you're to keep your trap closed until morning. Hear me?"

"I ain't deaf, but sometimes I'm a leetle mite dumb." The last he added in a low aside to Pennington, accompanying it with a wink; and aloud: "I'm mighty sorry, Cus—mighty sorry. If I'd only knowed it was you! By gosh, I'll never get over this—furnishin' horses to help arrest a friend, and a Pennington!"

"Don't worry about that for a minute, Jim. I haven't done anything. It's just a big mistake."

The officers and their prisoner were in the car and ready to start. The marshal pointed a finger at Jim.

"Don't forget what I told you about keeping your mouth shut until morning," he admonished.

They drove off toward Los Angeles. Jim watched them for a moment, as the red tail light diminished in the distance. Then he turned into the office of his feed barn and took the telephone receiver from its hook. "Gimme Ganado No. 1," he said to the sleepy night operator.

It was five minutes before continuous ringing brought the colonel to the extension telephone in his bedroom. He seemed unable to comprehend the meaning of what Jim was trying to tell him, so sure was he that Custer was in bed and asleep in a near-by room; but at last he was half convinced, for he had known Jim for many years, and well knew his stability and his friendship.

"If it was anybody but you, Jim, I'd say you were a damned liar," he commented in characteristic manner; "but what in hell did they take the boy for?"

"They wouldn't say. Just as I told 'em, I don't know what he done, but I know he never done it."

"You're right, Jim—my boy couldn't do a crooked thing!"

"I'm just like you, colonel—I know there ain't a crooked hair in Cus Pennington's head. If there's anything I can do, colonel, you jest let me know."

"You'll bring the Apache up in the morning? Thank you again, Jim, and good-by."

He hung up the receiver. While he dressed hastily, he explained to his wife the purport of the message he had just received.

"What are you going to do, Custer?" she asked.

"I'm going to Los Angeles, Julia. Unless that marshal's driving a racing car, I'll be waiting for him when he gets there!"

Shortly before breakfast the following morning two officers, armed with a warrant, searched the castle on the hill. In Custer Pennington's closet they found something which seemed to fill them with elation—two full bottles of whisky and an empty bottle, each bearing a label identical with those on the bottles they had found in the cases borne by the burros. With this evidence and the laden pack train, they started off toward the village.

Shannon Burke had put in an almost sleepless night. For hours she had lain watching the black silhouette of the big cupola against the clear sky, waiting for the light which would announce that Cus-

ter had returned home in safety; but no light had shone to relieve her anxiety. She had strained her ears through the long hours of the night for the sound of shooting from the hills; but only the howling of coyotes and the hooting of owls had disturbed the long silence. She sought to assure herself that all was well—that Custer had returned and forgotten to switch on the cupola light—that he had not forgotten it, but that the bulb was burned out. She manufactured probable and improbable explanations by the score; but always a disturbing premonition of evil dispersed the cohorts of hope.

She was up early in the morning, and in the saddle at the first streak of dawn, riding directly to the stables of the Rancho del Ganado. The stableman was there, saddling the horses while they fed.

"No one has come down yet?" she asked.

"The Apache's gone," he replied. "I don't understand it. He hasn't been in his box all night. I was just thinkin' of goin' up to the house to see if Custer was there. Don't seem likely he'd be ridin' all night, does it?"

"No," she said. Her heart was in her mouth. She could scarcely speak. "I'll ride up for you," she managed to say.

Wheeling Baldy, she put him up the steep hill to the house. The iron gate that closed the patio arch at night was still down, so she rode around to the north side of the house and *coo-hooed* to attract the attention of some one within. Mrs. Pennington, followed by Eva, came to the door. Both were fully dressed. When they saw who it was, they came out and told Shannon what had happened.

He was not injured, then! The sudden sense of relief left her weak, and for a moment she did not consider the other danger that confronted him. He was safe! That was all she cared about just then. Later she commenced to realize the gravity of his situation, and the innocent part that she had taken in involving him in the toils of the scheme which her interference must have suggested to those actually responsible for the traffic in stolen liquor, the guilt of which they had now cleverly shifted to the shoulders of an innocent man. Intuitively she guessed Slick Allen's part in the unhappy contretemps of the previous night; for she knew of the threats he had made against Custer Pennington, and of

his complicity in the criminal operations of the bootleggers.

How much she knew! More than any other, she knew all the details of the whole tragic affair. She alone could untangle the knotted web, and yet she dared not until there was no other way. She dared not let them guess that she knew more of the matter than they. She could not admit such knowledge without revealing the source of it and exposing herself to the merited contempt of these people whose high regard had become her obsession, whose friendship was her sole happiness, and the love she had conceived for one of them the secret altar at which she worshiped.

In the last extremity, if there was no alternative, she would sacrifice everything for him. To that her love committed her; but she would wait until there was no other way. She had suffered so grievously through no fault of her own that she clung with desperation to the brief happiness which had come into her life, and which was now threatened, once again because of no wrong-doing on her part.

Fate had been consistently unkind to her. Was it fair that she should suffer always for the wickedness of another? She had at least the right to hope and wait.

But there was something that she could do. When she turned Baldy down the hill from the Penningtons', she took the road home that led past the Evanses' ranch, and, turning in, dismounted and tied Baldy at the fence. Her knock was answered by Mrs. Evans.

"Is Guy here?" asked Shannon.

Hearing her voice, Guy came from his room, drawing on his coat.

"You're getting as bad as the Penningtons," he said, laughing. "They have no respect for Christian hours!"

"Something has happened," she said, "that I thought you should know about. Custer was arrested last night by government officers and taken to Los Angeles. He was out on the Apache at the time. No one seems to know where he was arrested, or why; but the supposition is that they found him in the hills, for the man who runs the feed barn in the village—Jim—told the colonel that the officers got horses from him and rode up toward the ranch, and that it was a couple of hours later that they brought Custer back on the Apache. The stableman just told me that the Apache had not been in his stall all night, and I

know—Custer told me not to tell, but it will make no difference now—that he was going up into the hills last night to try to catch the men who have been bringing down loads on burros every Friday night for a long time, and who cut his fence last Friday."

She looked straight into Guy's eyes as she spoke; but he dropped his as a flush mounted his cheek.

"I thought," she continued, "that Guy might want to go to Los Angeles and see if he could help Custer in any way. The colonel went last night."

"I'll go now," said Guy. "I guess I can help him."

His voice was suddenly weary, and he turned away with an air of dejection which assured Shannon that he intended to do the only honorable thing that he could do—assume the guilt that had been thrown upon Custer's shoulders, no matter what the consequences to himself. She had had little doubt that Guy would do this, for she realized his affection for Custer, as well as the impulsive generosity of his nature, which, however marred by weakness, was still fine by instinct.

Half an hour later, after a hasty breakfast, young Evans started for Los Angeles, while his mother and Shannon, standing on the porch of the bungalow, waved their good-byes as his roadster swung through the gate into the county road. Mrs. Evans had only a vague idea as to what her son could do to assist Custer Pennington out of his difficulty; but Shannon Burke knew that Pennington's fate lay in the hands of Guy Evans, unless she chose to tell what she knew.

Colonel Pennington had overtaken the marshal's car before the latter reached Los Angeles, but after a brief parley on the road he had discovered that he could do nothing to alter the officer's determination to place Custer in the county jail pending his preliminary hearing before a United States commissioner. Neither the colonel's plea that his son should be allowed to accompany him to a hotel for the night, nor his assurance that he would be personally responsible for the young man's appearance before the commissioner on the following morning, availed to move the obdurate marshal from his stand; nor would he permit the colonel to talk with the prisoner.

This was the last straw. Colonel Pennington had managed to dissemble outward

indications of his rising ire, but now an amused smile lighted his son's face as he realized that his father was upon the verge of an explosion. He caught the older man's eye and shook his head.

"It'll only make it worse," he cautioned.

The colonel directed a parting glare at the marshal, muttered something about homeopathic intellects, and turned back to his roadster.

XXIII

DURING the long ride to Los Angeles, and later in his cell in the county jail, Custer Pennington had devoted many hours to seeking an explanation of the motives underlying the plan to involve him in a crime of which he had no knowledge, nor even a suspicion of the identity of its instigators. To his knowledge, he had no enemies whose hostility was sufficiently active to lead them to do him so great a wrong. He had had no trouble with any one recently, other than his altercation with Slick Allen several months before; yet it was obvious that he had been deliberately sacrificed for some ulterior purpose. What that purpose was he could only surmise.

The most logical explanation, he finally decided, was that those actually responsible, realizing that discovery was imminent, had sought to divert suspicion from themselves by fastening it upon another. That they had selected him as the victim might easily be explained on the ground that his embarrassing interest in their movements had already centered their attention upon him, while it also offered the opportunity for luring him into the trap without arousing his suspicions.

It was, then, just a combination of circumstances that had led him into his present predicament; but there still remained unanswered one question that affected his peace of mind more considerably than all the others combined. Who had divulged to the thieves his plans for the previous night?

Concurrently with that question there arose before his mind's eye a picture of Shannon Burke and Baldy as they topped the summit above Jackknife from the trail that led across the basin meadow back into the hills, he knew not where.

"I can't believe that it was she," he told himself for the hundredth time. "She could not have done it. I won't believe it! She could explain it all if I could ask her;

but I can't ask her. There is a great deal that I cannot understand, and the most inexplicable thing is that she could possibly have had any connection whatever with the affair."

When his father came with an attorney, in the morning, the son made no mention of Shannon Burke's ride into the hills, or of her anxiety, when they parted in the afternoon, to learn if he was going to carry out his plan for Friday night.

"Did any one know of your intention to watch for these men?" asked the attorney.

"No one," he replied; "but they might have become suspicious from the fact that the week before I had all the gates padlocked on Friday. They had to cut the fence that night to get through. They probably figured that it was getting too hot for them, and that on the following Friday I would take some other steps to discover them. Then they made sure of it by sending me that message from Los Angeles. Gee, but I bit like a sucker!"

"It is unfortunate," remarked the attorney, "that you had not discussed your plans with some one before you undertook to carry them out on Friday night. If we could thus definitely establish your motive for going alone into the hills, and to the very spot where you were discovered with the pack train, I think it would go much further toward convincing the court that you were there without any criminal intent than your own unsupported testimony to that effect."

"But haven't you his word for it?" demanded the colonel.

"I am not the court," replied the attorney, smiling.

"Well, if the court isn't a damned fool it'll know he wouldn't have padlocked the gates the week before to keep himself out," stated the colonel conclusively.

"The government might easily assume that he did that purposely to divert suspicion from himself. At least, it is no proof of innocence."

Colonel Pennington snorted.

"The best thing to do now," said the attorney, "is to see if we can get an immediate hearing, and arrange for bail in case he is held to the grand jury."

"I'll go with you," said the colonel.

They had been gone but a short time when Guy Evans was admitted to Custer's cell. The latter looked up and smiled when he saw who his visitor was.

"It was bully of you to come," he said. "Bringing condolences, or looking for material, old thing?"

"Don't joke, Cus," exclaimed Evans. "It's too rotten to joke about, and it's all my fault."

"Your fault?"

"I'm the guilty one. I've come down to give myself up."

"Guilty! Give yourself up! What are you talking about?"

"God, Cus, I hate to tell you. It didn't seem such an awful thing to do until this happened. Every one's buying booze, or selling booze, or making booze. Every one's breaking the damned old Eighteenth Amendment, and it's got so it don't seem like committing a crime, or anything like that. You know, Cus, that I wouldn't do anything criminal, and oh, God, what 'll Eva think?"

Guy covered his face with his hands and choked back a sob.

"Just what in the devil are you talking about?" inquired Pennington. "Do you mean to tell me that you have been mixed up in—well, what do you know about that?" A sudden light had dawned upon Custer's understanding. "That hootch that you've been getting me—that I joked you about—it was really the stuff that was stolen from a bonded warehouse in New York? It wasn't any joke at all?"

"You can see for yourself now how much of a joke it was," replied Evans.

"I'll admit," returned Custer ruefully, "that it does require considerable of a sense of humor to see it in this joint!"

"What do you suppose they'll do to me?" asked Guy. "Do you suppose they'll send me to the penitentiary?"

"Tell me the whole thing from the beginning—who got you into it, and just what you've done. Don't omit a thing, no matter how much it incriminates you. I don't need to tell you, old man, that I'm for you, no matter what you've done."

"I know that, Cus; but I'm afraid no one can help me. I'm in for it. I knew it was stolen from the start. I have been selling it since last May—seven thousand seven hundred and seventy-six quarts of it—and I made a dollar on every quart. It was what I was going to start housekeeping on. Poor little Eva!" Again a sob half choked him. "It was Slick Allen that started me. First he sold me some; then he got me to sell you a bottle, and bring

him the money. Then he had me, or at least he made me think so; and he insisted on my handling it for them out in the valley. It wasn't hard to persuade me, for it looked safe, and it didn't seem like such a rotten thing to do, and I wanted the money the worst way. I know they're all bum excuses. I shan't make any excuses—I'll take my medicine; but it's when I think of Eva that it hurts. It's only Eva that counts!"

"Yes," said Pennington, laying his hand affectionately on the other's shoulder. "It is only Eva who counts; and because of Eva, and because you and I love her so much, you cannot go to the penitentiary."

"What do you mean—cannot go?"

"Have you told any one else what you have just told me?"

"No."

"Don't. Go back home, and keep your mouth shut."

"You mean that you will take a chance of going up for what I did? Nothing doing! Do you suppose I'd let you, Cus, the best friend I've got in the world, go to the pen for me—for something I did?"

"It's not for you, Guy. I wouldn't go to the pen for you or any other man; but I'd go to the pen for Eva, and so would you."

"I know it, but I can't let you do it. I'm not rotten, Cus!"

"You and I don't count. To see her unhappy and humiliated would be worse for me than spending a few years in the penitentiary. I'm innocent. No matter if I am convicted, I'll know I'm innocent, and Eva'll know it, and so will all the rest at Ganado; but, Guy, they've got too much on you if they ever suspect you, and the fact that you voluntarily admitted your guilt would convince even my little sister. If you were sent up it might ruin her life—it *would* ruin it. Things could never be the same for her again; but if I was sentenced for a few years, it would only be the separation from a brother whom she knew to be innocent, and in whom she still had undiminished confidence. She wouldn't be humiliated—her life wouldn't be ruined; and when I came back everything would be just as it was before. If you go, things will not be the same when you come back—they can never be the same again. You cannot go!"

"I cannot let you go, and be punished for what I did, while I remain free!"

"You've got to—it's the easiest way. We've all got to be punished for what you did—those who love us are always punished for our sins; but let me tell you that I don't think you are going to escape punishment if I go up for this. You're going to suffer more than I. You're going to suffer more than you would if you went up yourself; but it can't be helped. The question is, are you man enough to do this for Eva? It is your sacrifice more than mine."

Evans swallowed hard and tried to speak. It was a moment before he succeeded.

"My God, Cus, I'd rather go myself!"

"I know you would."

"I can never have any self-respect again. I can never look a decent man in the face. Every time I see Eva, or your mother, or the colonel, I'll think: 'You dirty cur, you let their boy go to the pen for something you did!' Oh, Cus, please don't ask me to do it! There must be some other way. And—and, Cus, think of Grace. We've been forgetting Grace. What 'll it mean to Grace if you are sent up?"

"It won't mean anything to Grace, and you know it. None of us mean much to Grace any more."

Guy looked out of the little barred window, and tears came to his eyes.

"I guess you're right," he said.

"You're going to do it, Guy—for Eva?"

"For Eva—yes."

Pennington brightened up as if a great load had been lifted from his shoulders.

"Good!" he cried. "Now the chances are that I'll not be sent up, for they've nothing on me—they can't have; but if I am, you've got to take my place with the folks. You've had your lesson. I know you'll never pull another fool stunt like this again. And quit drinking, Guy. I haven't much excuse for preaching; but you're the sort that can't do it. Leave it alone. Good-by, now; I'd rather you were not here when father comes back—you might weaken."

Evans took the other's hand.

"I envy you, Cus—on the level, I do!"

"I know it; but don't feel too bad about it. It's one of those things that's done, and it can't be undone. Roosevelt would have called what you've got to do 'grasping the nettle.' Grasp it like a man!"

Evans walked slowly from the jail, entered his car, and drove away. Of the two hearts his was the heavier; of the two burdens his the more difficult to bear.

Custer Pennington, appearing before a United States commissioner that afternoon for his preliminary hearing, was held to the Federal grand jury, and admitted to bail. The evidence brought by the deputies who had searched the Pennington home, taken in connection with the circumstances surrounding his arrest, seemed to leave the commissioner no alternative. Even the colonel had to admit that to himself, though he would never have admitted it to another. The case would probably come before the grand jury on the following Wednesday.

The colonel wanted to employ detectives at once to ferret out those actually responsible for the theft and bootlegging of the stolen whisky; but Custer managed to persuade him not to do so, on the ground that it would be a waste of time and money, since the government was already engaged upon a similar pursuit.

"Don't worry, father," he said. "They haven't a shred of evidence that I stole the whisky, or that I ever sold any. They found me with it—that is all. I can't be hanged for that. Let them do the worrying. I want to get home in time to eat one of Hannah's dinners. I'll say they don't set much of a table in the sheriff's boarding house!"

"Where did you get the three bottles they found in your room?"

"I bought them."

"I asked where, not how."

"I might get some one else mixed up in this if I were to answer that question. I can't do it."

"No," said the colonel, "you can't. When you buy whisky, nowadays, you are usually compounding a felony. It's certainly a rotten condition to obtain in the land of the free; but you've got to protect your accomplices. I shall not ask you again; but they'll ask you in court, my boy."

"All the good it 'll do them!"

"I suppose so; but I'd hate to see my boy sent to the penitentiary."

"You'd hate to be in court and hear him divulge the name of a man who had trusted him sufficiently to sell him whisky."

"I'd rather see you go to the penitentiary!" the colonel said.

That night, at dinner, Custer made light of the charge against him, yet at the same time he prepared them for what might happen, for the proceedings before the commissioner had impressed him with the grav-

ity of his case, as had also the talk he had had with his attorney afterward.

"No matter what happens," he said to them all, "I shall know that you know I am not guilty."

"My boy's word is all I need," replied his mother.

Eva came and put her arms about him.

"They wouldn't send you to jail, would they?" she demanded. "It would break my heart!"

"Not if you knew I was innocent."

"N-no, not then, I suppose; but it would be awful. If you were guilty, it would kill me. I'd never want to live if my brother was convicted of a crime, and was guilty of it. I'd kill myself first!"

Her brother drew her face down and kissed her.

"That would be foolish, dear," he said. "No matter what one of us does, such an act would make it all the worse—for those who were left."

"I can't help it," she said. "It isn't just because I have had the honor of the Penningtons preached to me all my life. It's because it's in me—the Pennington honor. It's a part of me, just as it's a part of you, and mother, and father. It's a part of the price we have to pay for being Penningtons. I have always been proud of it, Custer, even if I am only a silly girl."

"I'm proud of it, too, and I haven't jeopardized it; but even if I had, you mustn't think about killing yourself on my account, or any one's else."

"Well, I know you're not guilty, so I don't have to."

"Good! Let's talk about something pleasant."

"Why didn't you see Grace while you were in Los Angeles?"

"I tried to. I called up her boarding place from the lawyer's office. I understood the woman who answered the phone to say that she would call her, but she came back in a couple of minutes and said that Grace was out on location."

"Did you leave your name?"

"I told the woman who I was when she answered the phone."

"I'm sorry you didn't see her," said Mrs. Pennington. "I often think that Mrs. Evans, or Guy, should run down to Los Angeles occasionally and see Grace."

"That's what Shannon says," said Custer. "I'll try to see her next week, before I come home."

"Shannon was up nearly all afternoon waiting to hear if we received any word from you. When you telephoned that you had been held to the Federal grand jury, she would scarcely believe it. She said there must be some mistake."

"Did she say anything else?"

"She asked whether Guy got there before you were held, and I told her that you said Guy visited you in the jail. She seems so worried about the affair—just as if she were one of the family. She is such a dear girl! I think I grow to love her more and more every day."

"Yes," said Custer, non-committally.

"She asked me one rather peculiar question," Eva went on.

"What was that?"

"She asked if I was *sure* that it was *you* who had been held to the grand jury."

"That was odd, wasn't it?"

"She's so sure of your innocence—just as sure as we are," said Eva.

"Well, that's very nice of her," remarked Custer.

XXIV

THE next morning he saw Shannon, who came to ride with them, the Penningtons, as had been her custom. She looked tired, as if she had spent a sleepless night. She had—she had spent two sleepless nights, and she had had to fight the old fight all over again. It had been very hard, even though she had won, for it had shown her that the battle was not over. She had thought that she had conquered the craving; but that had been when she had had no troubles or unhappiness to worry her mind and nerves. The last two days had been days of suffering for her, and the two sleepless nights had induced a nervous condition that begged for the quieting influence of the little white powder.

Custer noticed immediately that something was amiss. The roses were gone from her cheeks, leaving a suggestion of the old pallor; and though she smiled and greeted him happily, he thought that he detected an expression of wistfulness and pain in her face when she was not conscious that others were observing her.

There was a strange suggestion of change in their relations, which Custer did not attempt to analyze. It was as if he had been gone a long time, and, returning, had found Shannon changed through the natural processes of time and separation. She was not

the same girl—she could never be the same again, nor could their relations ever be the same.

The careless freedom of their consociation, which had resembled that of a brother and sister more than any other relationship between a man and a woman, had gone forever. What had replaced it Custer did not know. Sometimes he thought that it was a suspicion of Shannon that clung to his mind in spite of himself; but again and again he assured himself that he held no suspicion of her.

He wished, though, that she would explain that which was to him inexplicable. He had the faith to believe that she could explain it satisfactorily; but would she do so? She had had the opportunity, before this thing had occurred, and had not taken advantage of it. He would give her another opportunity that day, and he prayed that she would avail herself of it. Why he should care so much, he did not try to reason. He did not even realize how much he did care.

Presently he turned toward her.

"I am going to ride over to the east pasture after breakfast," he said, and waited.

"Is that an invitation?"

He smiled and nodded.

"But not if it isn't perfectly convenient," he added.

"I'd love to come with you. You know I always do."

"Fine! And you'll breakfast with us?"

"Not to-day. I have a couple of letters to write that I want to get off right away; but I'll be up between eight thirty and nine. Is that too late?"

"I'll ride down after breakfast and wait for you—if I won't be in the way."

"Of course you won't. It will take me only a few minutes to write my letters."

"How are you going to mail them? This is Sunday."

"Mr. Powers is going to drive in to Los Angeles to-day. He'll mail them in the city."

"Who looks after things when Mr. and Mrs. Powers are away?"

"Who looks after things? Why, I do."

"The chickens, and the sow, and Baldy—you take care of them all?"

"Certainly, and I have more than that now."

"How's that?"

"Nine little pigs! They came yesterday. They're perfect beauties."

The man laughed.

"What are you laughing about?" she demanded.

"The idea of you taking care of chickens and pigs and a horse!"

"I don't see anything funny about it, and it's lots of fun. Did you think I was too stupid?"

"I was just thinking what a change two months have made. What would you have done if you'd been left alone two months ago with a hundred hens, a horse, and ten pigs to care for?"

"The question then would have been what the hens, the horse, and the pigs would have done; but now I know pretty well what to do. The two letters I have to write are about the little pigs. I don't know much about them, and so I am writing to Berkeley and Washington for the latest bulletins."

"Why don't you ask us?"

"Gracious, but I do! I am forever asking the colonel questions, and the boys at the hog house must hate to see me coming. I've spent hours in the office, reading Lovejoy and Colton; but I want something for ready reference. I've an idea that I can raise lots more hogs than I intended by fencing the orchard and growing alfalfa between the rows, for pasture. There's something solid and substantial about hogs that suggests a bank balance even in the years when the orange crop may be short or a failure, or the market poor."

"You've got the right idea," said Custer. "There isn't a rancher or an orchardist, big or little, in the valley who couldn't make more money year in and year out if he'd keep a few brood sows."

"What's Cus doing?" asked Eva, who had reined back beside them. "Preaching hog raising again? That's his idea of a dapper little way to entertain a girl—hogs, Herefords and horses! Wouldn't he make a hit in society? Regular little tea pointer, I'll say!"

"I knew you were about to say something," remarked her brother. "You've been quiet for all of five minutes."

"I've been thinking," said Eva. "I've been thinking how lonely it will be when you have to go away to jail."

"Why, they can't send me to jail—I haven't done anything," he tried to reassure her.

"I'm so afraid, Cus!" The tears came to her eyes. "I lay awake for hours last

night, thinking about it. Oh, Cus, I just couldn't stand it if they sent you to jail! Do you think the men who did it would let you go for something they did? Could any one be so wicked? I never hated any one in my life, but I could hate them, if they don't come forward and save you. I could *hate* them, *hate* them, *hate* them! Oh, Cus, I believe that I could *kill* the man who would do such a thing to my brother!"

"Come, dear, don't worry about it. The chances are that they'll free me. Even if they don't, you mustn't feel quite so bitterly against the men who are responsible. There may be reasons that you know nothing of that would keep them silent. Let's not talk about it. All we can do now is to wait and see what the grand jury is going to do. In the meantime I don't intend to worry."

Shannon Burke, her heart heavy with shame and sorrow, listened as might a condemned man to the reading of his death sentence. She felt almost the degradation that might have been hers had she deliberately planned to ensnare Custer Pennington in the toils that had been laid for him.

She determined that she would go before the grand jury and tell all she knew. Then she would go away. She would not have to see the contempt and hatred they must surely feel for her after she had recited the cold facts that she must lay before the jury, unmitigated by any of those extenuating truths that must lie forever hidden in the secret recesses of her soul. They would know only that she might have warned Custer, and did not; that she might have cleared him at his preliminary hearing, and did not. The fact that she had come to his rescue at the eleventh hour would not excuse her, in their minds, of the guilt of having permitted the Pennington honor to be placed in jeopardy needlessly; nor could it explain her knowledge of the crime, or those associations of her past life that had made it possible for her to have gained such knowledge.

No, she could never face them again after the following Wednesday; but until then she would cling to the brief days of happiness that remained to her before the final catastrophe of her life, for it was thus that she thought of it—the moment and the act that would forever terminate her intercourse with the Penningtons, that would turn the respect of the man she loved to loathing.

She counted the hours before the end. There would be two more morning rides—to-morrow and Tuesday. They would ask her to dinner, or to lunch, or to breakfast several times in the ensuing three days, and there would be rides with Custer. She would take all the happy memories that she could into the bleak and sunless future.

Their ride that morning was over a loved and familiar trail that led across El Camino Corto over low hills into Horse Camp Cañon, and up Horse Camp to Coyote Springs; then over El Camino Largo to Sycamore Cañon and down beneath the old, old sycamores to the ranch. She felt that she knew each bush and tree and boulder, and they held for her the quiet restfulness of the familiar faces of old friends. She should miss them, but she would carry them in her memory forever.

When they came to the fork in the road, she would not let Custer ride home with her.

"At eight thirty, then," he called to her, as she urged Baldy into a canter and left them with a gay wave of the hand that gave no token of the heavy sorrow in her heart.

As was her custom, she ate breakfast with Mr. and Mrs. Powers at the little tenant cottage a couple of hundred yards in rear of her own bungalow—a practice which gave her an opportunity to discuss each day's work in advance with her foreman, and at the same time to add to her store of information concerning matters of ranching and citrus culture. Her knowledge of these things had broadened rapidly, and was a constant source of surprise to Powers, who took great pride in bragging about it to his friends; for Shannon had won as great a hold upon the hearts of these two as she had upon all who were fortunate enough to know her well.

After breakfast, as she was returning to her bungalow to write her letters, she saw a Mexican boy on a bicycle turn in at her gate. They met in front of the bungalow.

"Are you Miss Burke?" he asked. "Bartolo says for you to come to his camp in the mountains this morning, sure," he went on, having received an affirmative reply.

"Who is Bartolo?"

"He says you know. You went to his camp a week ago yesterday."

"Tell him I do not know him and will not go."

"He says to tell you that he only wants to talk to you about your friend who is in trouble."

The girl thought for a moment. Possibly here was a way out of her dilemma. If she could force Bartolo by threats of exposure, he might discover a way to clear Custer Pennington without incriminating himself. She turned to the boy.

"Tell him I will come."

"I do not see him again. He is up in his camp now. He told me this yesterday. He also told me to tell you that he would be watching for you, and if you did not come alone you would not find him."

"Very well," she said, and turned into the bungalow.

She wrote her letters, but she was not thinking about them. Then she took them over to Powers to take to the city for her. After that she went to the telephone and called the Rancho del Ganado, asking for Custer when she got the connection.

"I'm terribly disappointed," she said, when he came to the telephone. "I find I simply can't ride this morning; but if you'll put it off until afternoon—"

"Why, certainly! Come up to lunch, and we'll ride afterward," he told her.

"You won't go, then, until afternoon?" she asked.

"I'll ride over to the east pasture this morning, and we'll just take a ride any old place that you want to go this afternoon."

"All right," she replied.

She had hoped that he would not ride that morning. There was a chance that he might see her, even though the east pasture was miles from the trail she would ride, for there were high places on both trails, where a horseman would be visible for several miles.

"This noon at lunch, then," he said.

XXV

HALF an hour later Custer Pennington swung into the saddle and headed the Apache up Sycamore Cañon.

The trail to the east pasture led through Jackknife. As he passed the spot where he had been arrested on the previous Friday night, the man made a wry face—more at the recollection of the ease with which he had been duped than because of the fact of his arrest. Being free from any sense of guilt, he could view with a certain lightness of spirit that was almost levity the mere physical aspects of possible duress. The

reality of his service to Eva could not but tend to compensate for any sorrow he must feel because of the suffering his conviction and imprisonment might bring to his family, so much greater must be their sorrow should Eva be permitted to learn the truth.

When Shannon had broken their engagement for the morning, he had felt a disappointment entirely out of proportion to its cause—a thing which he had realized himself, but had been unable to analyze. Now, in anticipation of seeing her at noon and riding with her after lunch, he experienced a rise in spirits that was equally unaccountable. He liked her very much, and she was excellent company—which, of course, would account for the pleasure he derived from being with her. To-day, too, he hoped for an explanation of her ride into the mountains the week before, so that there might be no longer any shadow on his friendship for her.

The more he thought about it, the more convinced he was that this afternoon she would explain the whole matter quite satisfactorily, and presently he found himself whistling as if there were no such places as jails or penitentiaries in the whole wide and beautiful world.

Just then he reached the summit of the trail leading out of Jackknife Cañon toward the east pasture. As was his wont, the Apache stopped to breathe after the hard climb, and, as seems to be the habit of all horses in like circumstances, he turned around and faced in the opposite direction from that in which his rider had been going.

Below and to Custer's right the ranch buildings lay dotted about in the dust like children's toys upon a gray rug. Beyond was the castle on the hill, shining in the sun, and farther still the soft-carpeted valley, in grays and browns and greens. Then the young man's glance wandered to the left and out over the basin meadow, and instantly the joy died out of his heart and the happiness from his eyes. Straight along the mysterious trail loped a horse and rider toward the mountains, and even at that distance he recognized them as Baldy and Shannon.

The force of the shock was almost equivalent to an unexpected blow in the face. What could it mean? He recalled her questions. She had deliberately sought to learn his plans, as she had that other day, and then, as before, she had hastened off to some mysterious rendezvous in the hills.

Suddenly a hot wave of anger surged through him. Quiet and self-controlled as he usually was, there were times when the Pennington temper seized and dominated him so completely that he himself was appalled by the acts it precipitated. Under its spell a Pennington might commit murder. Now Custer did what was almost as foreign to his nature—he cursed the girl who rode on, unconscious of his burning eyes upon her, toward the mountains. He cursed her aloud, searching his memory for opprobrious epithets and anathemas to hurl after her.

This was the end. He was through with her forever. What did he know about her? What did any of them know about her? She had never mentioned her life or associations in the city—he recalled that now. She had known no one whom they knew, and they had taken her in and treated her as a daughter of the house, without knowing anything of her; and this was their reward!

She was doubtless a hireling of the gang that had stolen the whisky and disposed of it through Guy. They had sent her here to spy on Guy and to watch the Penningtons. It was she who had set the trap in which he had been caught, not to save Guy, but to throw the suspicion of guilt upon Custer.

But for what reason? There was no reason except that he had been selected from the first to be the scapegoat when the government officers were too hot upon their trail. She had watched him carefully. God, but she had been cunning and he credulous! There had been scarce a day that she had not been with him. She had ridden the hills with him, and she had kept him from following the mysterious trail—so he reasoned in his rage, though as a matter of fact she had done nothing of the sort; but anger and hate are blind, and Custer Pennington was angry and filled with hate.

He believed that he never had hated before as he hated this girl now, so far to the other extreme had the shock of her duplicity driven his regard for her. He would see her just once more, and he would tell her what he thought of her, so that there might be no chance that she would ever again enter the home of the Penningtons. He must see to that before he went away, that Eva might not be exposed to the influence of such a despicable character.

But he could not see her to-day. He could not trust himself to see her, for even in his anger he remembered that she was a woman, and that when he saw her he must treat her as a woman. If she had been within reach when he first discovered her, a moment since, he could have struck her, choked her.

With the realization, the senseless fury of his anger left him. He turned the Apache away, and headed him again toward the east pasture; but deep within his heart was a cold anger that was quite as terrible, though in a different way.

Shannon Burke rode up the trail toward the camp of the smugglers, all unconscious that there looked down upon her from a high ridge behind eyes filled with hate and loathing—the eyes of the man she loved.

She put Baldy up the steep trail that had so filled her with terror when she first scaled it, and down upon the other side into the grove of oaks that had hidden the camp; but now there was no camp there—only the debris that always marks the stopping place of men.

As she reached the foot of the trail, she saw Bartolo standing beneath a great oak, awaiting her. His pony stood with trailing reins beneath the tree. A rifle butt protruded from a boot on the right of the saddle. He came forward as she guided Baldy toward the tree.

"*Buenos días, señorita,*" he greeted her, twisting his pock-marked face into the semblance of a smile.

"What do you want of me?" Shannon demanded.

"I need money," he said. "You get money from Evans. He got all the money from the hootch we take down two weeks ago. We never get no chance to get it from him."

"I'll get you nothing!"

"You get money now—and whenever I want it," said the Mexican, "or I tell about Crumb. You Crumb's woman. I tell how you peddle dope. I know! You do what I tell you, or you go to the pen. *Sabe?*"

"Now listen to me," said the girl. "I didn't come up here to take orders from you. I came to give you orders."

"What?" exclaimed the Mexican, and then he laughed aloud. "You give me orders? That is damn funny!"

"Yes, it is funny. You will enjoy it immensely when I tell you what you are to do."

"Hurry, then; I have no time to waste." He was still laughing.

"You are going to find some way to clear Mr. Pennington of the charge against him. I don't care what the way is, so long as it does not incriminate any other innocent person. If you can do it without getting yourself in trouble, well and good. I do not care; but you must see that there is evidence given before the grand jury next Wednesday that will prove Mr. Pennington's innocence."

"Is that all?" inquired Bartolo, grinning broadly.

"That is all."

"And if I don't do it—eh?"

"Then I shall go before the grand jury and tell them about you, and Allen—about the opium and the morphine and the cocaine—how you smuggled the stolen booze from the ship off the coast up into the mountains."

"You think you would do that?" he asked. "But how about me? Wouldn't I be telling everything I know about you? Allen would testify, too, and they would make Crumb come and tell how you lived with him. Oh, no, I guess you don't tell the grand jury nothing!"

"I shall tell them everything. Do you think I care about myself? I will tell them all that Allen or Crumb could tell; and listen, Bartolo—I can tell them something more. There used to be five men in your gang. There were three when I came up last week, and Allen is in jail; but where is the other?"

The man's face went black with anger, and perhaps with fear, too.

"What you know about that?" he demanded sharply.

"Allen told Crumb the first time he came to the Hollywood bungalow that he was having trouble among his gang, that you were a hard lot to handle, and that already one named Bartolo had killed one named Gracial. How would you like me to tell that to the grand jury?"

"You never tell that to no one!" growled the Mexican. "You know too damn much for your health!"

He had stepped suddenly forward and seized her wrist. She struck at him and at the same time put the spurs to Baldy—in her fear and excitement more severely than she had intended. The high-spirited animal, unused to such treatment, leaped forward past the Mexican, who, clinging to

the girl's wrist, dragged her from the saddle. Baldy turned, and, feeling himself free, ran for the trail that led toward home.

"You know too damn much!" repeated Bartolo. "You better off up here alongside Gracial!"

The girl had risen to her feet and stood facing him. There was no fear in her eyes. She was very beautiful, and her beauty was not lost upon the Mexican.

"You mean that you would kill me to keep me from telling the truth about you?" she asked.

"Why not? Should I die instead? If you had kept your mouth shut, you would have been all right; but now"—he shrugged suggestively—"you better off up here beside Gracial."

"They'll get you and hang you for it," she said.

"Who will know?"

"The boy who brought me the message from you."

"He will not tell. He my son."

"I wrote a note and left it in my desk before I came up here, telling everything, for fear of something of this sort," she said.

"You lie!" he accused, correctly; "but for fear you did, I go down and burn your house to-night, after I get through with you. The ground pretty hard after the hot weather—it take me long time to dig a hole beside Gracial!"

The girl was at her wits' end now. Her pitiful little lie had not availed. She began to realize that nothing would avail. She had made the noose, stuck her head into it, and sprung the trap. It was too late to alter the consequences. The man had the physique of a bull—she could not hope to escape him by recourse to any power other than her wits, and in the first effort along that line she had failed miserably and put him on his guard.

Her case appeared hopeless. She thought of pleading with him, but realized the futility of it. The fact that she did not do so indicated her courage, which had not permitted her to lose her head. She saw that it was either his life or hers, as he saw the matter, and that it was going to be hers was obvious.

The man stood facing her, holding her by the wrist. His eyes appraised her boldly.

"You damn good-looking," he said, and pulled the girl toward him. "Before I kill you, I—"

He threw an arm about her roughly, and, leaning far over her as she pulled away, he sought to reach her lips with his.

XXVI

THE Apache had taken but a few steps on the trail toward the east pasture when Custer reined in suddenly and wheeled him about.

"I'll settle this thing now," he muttered. "I'll catch her with them. I'll find out who the others are. By God, I've got her now, and I've got them!"

He spurred the Apache into a lope along the steep and dangerous declivity leading downward into the basin. The horse was surprised. Never before had he been allowed to go down hill faster than a walk—his sound forelegs attested the careful horsemanship of his rider.

Where the trail wound around bushes, he took perilous jumps on the steep hillside, for his speed was too great to permit him to make the short turns. He cleared them, and somehow he stuck to the trail beyond. His iron shoes struck fire from half embedded boulders.

A rattler crossing the trail ahead coiled, buzzing its warning. The hillside was steep—there was no footing above or below the snake. The Apache could not have stopped in time to save himself from those poisoned fangs. A coward horse would have wheeled and gone over the cliff; but the Morgan is no coward.

The rider saw the danger at the instant the horse did. The animal felt the spurs touch him lightly, he heard a word of encouragement from the man he trusted. As the snake struck, he rose, gathering his four feet close to his belly, and cleared the danger spot far out of reach of the needle-like fangs.

The trail beyond was narrow, rocky, and shelving—the thing could not have happened in a worse place. The Apache lit, stumbled, slipped. His off hind foot went over the edge. He lunged forward upon his knees.

Only the cool horsemanship of his rider saved them both. A pound of weight thrown in the wrong direction would have toppled the horse to the bottom of the rocky gorge; a heavy hand upon the bit would have accomplished the same result. Pennington sat easily the balanced seat that gave the horse the best chance to regain his footing. His touch upon the bit was only

sufficient to impart confidence to his mount, giving the animal's head free play, as nature intended, as he scrambled back to the trail again.

At last they reached the safer footing of the basin, and were off in a straight line for the ravine into which led the mysterious trail. The Apache knew that there was need for haste—an inclination of his master's body, a closing of the knees against his barrel, the slight raising of the bridle hand, had told him this more surely than loud cries or the punishment of steel rowels. He flattened out and flew.

The cold rage that gripped Pennington brooked no delay. He was glad, though, that he was unarmed; for he knew that when he came face to face with the men with whom Shannon Burke had conspired against him, he might again cease to be master of his anger.

They reached the foot of the acclivity terminating at the summit of the ridge beyond which lay the camp of the bootleggers. Again the man urged his mount to the necessity of speed. The powerful beast leaped upward along the steep trail, digging his toes deep into the sun-baked soil, every muscle in his body strained to the limit of its powers.

At the summit they met Baldy, head and tail erect, snorting and riderless. The appearance of the horse and his evident fright bespoke something amiss. Custer had seen him just as he was emerging from the upper end of the dim trail leading down the opposite side of the hogback. He turned the Apache into it and headed him down toward the oaks.

Below, Shannon was waging a futile fight against the burly Bartolo. She struck at his face and attempted to push him from her, but he only laughed his crooked laugh and pushed her slowly toward the trampled dust of the abandoned camp.

"Before I kill you—" he repeated again and again, as if it were some huge joke.

He heard the sound of the Apache's hoofs upon the trail above, but he thought it the loose horse of the girl. Custer was almost at the bottom of the trail when the Mexican glanced up and saw him. With a curse, he hurled Shannon aside and leaped toward his pony.

At the same instant the girl saw the Apache and his rider, and in the next she saw Bartolo seize his rifle and attempt to draw it from its boot. Leaping to her feet,

she sprang toward the Mexican, who was cursing frightfully because the rifle had stuck and he could not readily extricate it from the boot. As she reached him, he succeeded in jerking the weapon free. Swinging about, he threw it to his shoulder and fired at Pennington, just as Shannon threw herself upon him, clutching at his arms and dragging the muzzle of the weapon downward. He struck at her face, and tried to wrench the rifle from her grasp; but she clung to it with all the desperation that the danger confronting the man she loved engendered.

Custer had thrown himself from the saddle and was running toward them. Bartolo saw that he could not regain the rifle in time to use it. He struck the girl a terrible blow in the face that sent her to the ground. Then he turned and vaulted into his saddle, and was away across the bottom and up the trail on the opposite side before Pennington could reach him and drag him from his pony.

Custer turned to the girl lying motionless upon the ground. He knelt and raised her in his arms. She had fainted, and her face was very white. He looked down into it—the face of the girl he hated. He felt his arms about her, he felt her body against his, and suddenly a look of horror filled his eyes.

He laid her back upon the ground, and stood up. He was trembling violently. As he had held her in his arms, there had swept over him an almost irresistible desire to crush her to him, to cover her eyes and cheeks with kisses, to smother her lips with them—the girl he hated!

A great light had broken upon his mental horizon—a light of understanding that left all his world in the dark shadow of despair. He loved Shannon Burke!

Again he knelt beside her, and very gently he lifted her in his arms until he could support her across one shoulder. Then he whistled to the Apache, who was nibbling the bitter leaves of the live oak. When the horse came to him, he looped the bridle reins about his arm and started on foot up the trail down which he had just ridden, carrying Shannon across his shoulder. At the summit of the ridge he found Baldy grazing upon the sparse, burned grasses of late September.

It was then that Shannon Burke opened her eyes. At first, confused by the rush of returning recollections, she thought that it

was the Mexican who was carrying her; but an instant later she recognized the whipcord riding breeches and the familiar boots and spurs of the son of Canado. Then she stirred upon his shoulder.

"I am all right now," she said. "You may put me down. I can walk."

He lowered her to the ground, but he still supported her as they stood facing each other.

"You came just in time," she said. "He was going to kill me."

"I am glad I came," was all that he said.

She noticed how tired and pinched Custer's face looked, as if he had risen from a sick bed after a long period of suffering. He looked older—very much older—and oh, so sad! It wrung her heart; but she did not question him. She was waiting for him to question her, for she knew that he must wonder why she had come here, and what the meaning of the encounter he had witnessed; but he did not ask her anything, beyond inquiring whether she thought she was strong enough to sit her saddle if he helped her mount.

"I shall be all right now," she assured him.

He caught Baldy and assisted her into the saddle. Then he mounted the Apache and led the way along the trail toward home. They were halfway across the basin meadow before either spoke. It was Shannon who broke the silence.

"You must have wondered what I was doing up there," she said, with a backward nod of her head.

"That would not be strange, would it?"

"I will tell you."

"No," he said. "It is bad enough that you went there to-day and the Saturday before I was arrested. Anything more that you could tell me would only make it worse. Do you remember that girl I told you about—that friend of Cousin William—who visited us?"

"Yes."

"I followed you up here to-day to tell you the same thing I told her."

"I understand," she said.

"You do not understand," he snapped, almost angrily. "You understand nothing. I only said that I followed to tell you that. I have not told you, have I? Well, I don't intend to tell you; but my shame that I don't is enough without you telling me any more to add to it. There can be no honorable excuse for your having come here

that other time, or this time, either. There is no reason in the world why a woman should have any dealings with criminals, or any knowledge that would make dealings with them possible. That is the reason I don't want you to tell me more. Oh, Shannon"—his voice broke—"I don't want to hear anything bad about you!"

She had been upon the verge of just anger until then. Even now she did not understand—only that he wanted to believe in her, however much he doubted her, and that their friendship had meant more to him than she had imagined.

"But I must tell you, Custer," she insisted. "Now that you have learned this much, I can see that your suspicions wrong me more than I deserve. I came here the Saturday before you were arrested to warn them that you were going to watch for them on the following Friday. Though I did not know the men, I knew what sort they were, and that they would kill you the moment they found that they were discovered. It was only to save your life that I came that other time, and this time I came to try to force them to go before the grand jury and clear you of the charge against you; but when I threatened the man, and he found what I knew about him, he said that he would kill me."

"You did not know that I was going to be arrested that night?"

"Oh, Custer, how could you believe that of me?"

"I didn't want to believe it."

"I came into all this information—about the work of this gang—by accidentally overhearing a conversation in Hollywood, months ago. I know the names of the principals, I know Guy's connection with them. To-day I was trying to keep Guy's name out, too, if that were possible; but he is guilty and you are not. I cannot understand how he could come back from Los Angeles without telling them the truth and removing the suspicion from you."

"I would not let him," said Pennington.

"You would not let him? You would go to the penitentiary for the crime of another?"

"Not for him, but for Eva. Guy and I thrashed it all out. He wanted to give himself up—he almost demanded that I should let him; but it can't be done. Eva must never know."

"But, Custer, you can't go! It wouldn't be fair—it wouldn't be right. I won't let

you go! I know enough to clear you, and I shall go before the grand jury on Wednesday and tell all I know."

"No," he said. "You must not. It would involve Guy."

"I won't mention Guy."

"But you will mention others, and they will mention Guy—don't doubt that for a minute." He turned suddenly toward her. "Promise me, Shannon, that you will not go—that you will not mention what you know to a living soul. I would rather go to the pen for twenty years than see Eva's life ruined. You don't know her. She's gay and happy and frivolous on the outside; but deep within her is a soul of wondrous sensitiveness and beauty, which is fortified and guarded by her pride and her honor. Strike down one of these, and you will have given her soul a wound from which it may never recover. She can understand neither meanness nor depravity in men and women. Should she ever learn that Guy had been connected with this gang, and that the money upon which they were to start their married life was the fruits of his criminality, it would break her heart. I know that Guy isn't criminally inclined, and that this will be a lesson that will keep him straight as long as he lives; but she wouldn't look at it that way. Now do you see why you must not tell what you know?"

"Perhaps you are right, but it seems to me she would not suffer any more if Guy went than if her brother went. She loves you very much."

"But she will know that I am innocent. If Guy went, she would know that he was guilty."

Shannon had no answer to this, and they were silent for a while.

"You will help me to keep this from Eva?" he asked.

"Yes."

She was thinking of the futility of her sacrifice, and wondering what explanation he was putting upon her knowledge of the activities of the criminals. He had said that there could be no reason in the world why a woman should have any dealings with such men, or any knowledge that would make dealings with them possible. What would he think of her if he knew the truth?

The man's mind was a chaos of conflicting thoughts—the sudden realization of a love that was as impossible as it was un-

welcome—recollection of his vows to Grace, which were as binding upon his honor as the marriage vows themselves would have been—doubts as to the character and antecedents of this girl who rode at his side to-day, and whose place in his life had suddenly assumed an importance beyond that of any other.

Then he turned a little, his eyes rested upon her profile, and he found it hard to doubt. It seemed impossible that there could be guile or sin beneath that beautiful exterior.

Shannon felt his eyes upon her, and looked up.

"You have been so good to me, Custer, all of you—you can never know how I have valued the friendship of the Penningtons, or what it has meant to me, or how I have striven to deserve it. I would have done anything to repay a part, at least, of what it has done for me. That was what I was trying to do—that is why I wanted to go before the grand jury, no matter what the cost to me; but I failed, and perhaps I have

only made it worse. I do not even know that you believe me."

"I believe you, Shannon," he said. "There is much that I do not understand; but I believe that what you did was done in our interests. There is nothing more that any of us can do now but keep still about what we know, for the moment one of those actually responsible is threatened with exposure Guy's name will be divulged—you may rest assured of that. They would be only too glad to shift the responsibility to his shoulders."

"But you will make some effort to defend yourself?"

"I shall simply plead not guilty, and tell the truth about why I was up there when the officers arrested me. That is all that I can do."

"You will make no other defense?"

"What other defense can I make that would not risk incriminating Guy?" Custer asked her.

She shook her head. It seemed quite hopeless.

(To be continued in the October number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

I LOOKED UP TO THE HILLS

I SHALL miss your stern, strong shapes against the sky;
I shall miss your upland challenge to my heart.
I hold you with long looks, as a lover's farewell eye
Holds the loved face from which he turns to part.
Mountains, good-by!

I would hoard your strength in my soul
For the day that is near,
When I shall find nothing noble to fill my eyes,
Nor trumpets high to fill with glory my ear—
The glory of the sun on the hills at his conquering rise;
Nothing that just to look on in the splendor of light
Makes me as morning itself,
Girded as morning with might;
And enough is to hear and to see,
To be one with the march of the whole.

I go where help there is none of morning stream
Among the boulders singing, nor pure light
Of moon or moonrise. Save by prayer or dream
Safety is none, but your remembered might
Shall aid my weakness, and my soul make strong;
So shall my feet pace still yon gleaming height,
And my heart sing with your remembered song.

Richard Leigh

Malay Madness

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—A ROMANCE OF THE MEETING OF
EAST AND WEST ON AN ISLAND OF THE TROPIC SEA

By Eleanor Gates and Frederick Moore

DROWSING luxuriously in a white canvas hammock under an awning on the quarter-deck, Hugh Gardner found himself slowly waking to a sound that was like the melodious purl of running water. It was a new sound. It accompanied noises so familiar that they did not disturb his sleep, such as the staccato chattering of the native crew of the *Karrakatta*, the low whine of the rope fenders as they were squeezed against the wharf of *Lan-duan* by the lifting tide, the occasional tinkle of a pan in the schooner's galley, the hard, wheeling cry of a venturesome tern as it came flapping at intervals about the topmasts, and the sucking and swashing of the swells under the hardwood planking of the wharf.

Gardner raised himself, leaning on an elbow. His length, measured by the hammock, was considerable. It was clad in a loose-fitting shirt—of cambric, and white—and a pair of web-belted pongee trousers. His clean-jawed face was overlaid by a coat of tan that browned his features almost to the shade of his hair, which abundantly covered a head rather strikingly well shaped. The eyes that opened to peer, across the rail of the schooner, to the bales of hemp and the boxes that were to be a part of the cargo, were young, gray, and frank.

What he discovered brought him sitting up straight.

"By thunder!" he breathed with undisguised appreciation.

The pleasant sound which had roused him was the musical rise and fall of a girl's voice—a low, clear voice which had in it a rich, birdlike note. It had, too, a certain quaint preciseness; yet it did not drawl. It was quick, each sentence ending with a

crispness that suggested both physical strength and authority.

"This is a good year for hemp," the voice was saying. "Last year also was good; but year before last, Mr. Dorrance—oh, how it made you swear! Now, though, I have better machinery for the hemp-stripping, and I prepare the best first. Even so, who knows what may happen next year? So I like very much what you have told me about my sandalwood trees."

She was standing full in the blinding glare of the late morning sun. On her head was a small tan-colored helmet, wound with a scarlet puggree which fell to her slender shoulders, and was firmly held in place by a narrow band that went under her chin. Her costume consisted of a woman's polo coat, of white linen and sleeveless, and a pair of riding breeches, smartly full. Under the coat was a blouse made of some thin, silky material. It had a broad collar that turned back, hiding the collar of the coat.

From knee to foot she was booted in brown. A quirt hung on her right wrist. As she talked, she whipped at her boot with it.

Just yet Gardner could not see her face—could not even tell what was the color of her hair. What captured his interest was her voice, which was not only sweet but dominating, and a figure charmingly boyish and as supple as it was slender.

The man to whom she was talking was sturdily built, and about fifty. He was wearing a wrinkled suit of white and a sun helmet that had seen service.

"I counted eighteen sandalwood trees," he told her, his tone serious, eager. "Margarita, if you'll let me handle the business for you, I'll see that you make a good profit

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off 'em. I'll have 'em shipped right here from your jetty with a cargo of my own stuff, so you won't have to worry about 'em once."

"You are so very kind!" She put out a hand in a gauntlet glove. "You take away all these troubles from me! Maybe next week you will be back on Landuan again. Yes? Then you will come up to the plantation to have tiffin?"

"Thanks!"

Dorrance bent his stocky figure toward the hand he was holding in his own huge fist, which was sun-cured to the shade of a smoked ham, and dotted with freckles that were almost startlingly black. To the watcher on the quarter-deck it appeared, for a moment, as if the older man were about to touch the gauntlet with a mustached lip; but Dorrance straightened, and the freckled hand gave the small one a hearty shake.

"Tiffin!" he agreed.

Now the girl half turned, and looked in the direction of the hammock. The strap of her helmet framed a face delicately modeled, exquisitely oval, and a blend of cream and rose. Her mouth was a deep rose, full and beautifully cut. Her chin was round, yet firm. Her bare throat was touched by the sun to a deep cream.

Under the forward visor of her helmet, dark hair that curled a trifle came nearly to finely drawn brows which she was bringing together in a curious little pucker, as she stared at Gardner out of eyes that had the soft black of velvet—eyes large and open, as frank and free from chicane as a child's, and glowingly magnetic.

Their magnetism held Gardner. He could not take his own eyes away. Thus, with equal interest, and almost in wonderment, for a long moment the two gazed at each other. Then the girl's chin lowered, and the young man in the hammock found himself intent upon the top of the scarlet-wound helmet.

The next moment she was gone, walking in an upheaved, energetic fashion, yet gracefully, even despite her boots.

"Mr. Honeywell!" she sang out, as she swung the quirt above her head.

"Señorita!"

The wharf against which the Karrakatta was shouldering lay midway of the south shore of Landuan Island. From the westward side of the jetty, and reaching five hundred feet along the white beach, was a

building that had no walls. It sheltered machinery, casks, a hemp press, yellowed canvas on bamboo stretchers, and fishing nets, and was much littered up by coconut coir and driftwood thrown into heaps.

Answering the girl's summons, out from under the roof came Honeywell, a tall, gangly American, with pale blue eyes and sun-bleached yellow hair. Except that he wore no coat, he was dressed like his young employer. His appearance was made striking by a thin, high-bridged Yankee nose and a large Adam's apple.

The young man on the quarter-deck experienced a qualm of something very like jealousy as he saw the girl and the man meet, the latter with a deferential lifting of his helmet, she with a flash of white teeth. Talking, the two slowly strolled toward a pair of small but mettlesome walers—Australian ponies—which were nipping at each other and neighing in alternating protest where they were tied at a corner of the godown.

When the pair of helmets had bobbed from sight, Gardner settled himself deeper in the hammock, leaned back, and let his eyes slowly travel over the island—right, left, and straight before him.

In construction, Landuan was a typical island of the tropics, being made up of twin volcanic hills joined by lower ground. About midway of its northern coast this lower ground was swampy, not yet being wholly filled in by the action of the sea. The island was long from west to east, and the swamp almost cut it in two at its narrow waist.

Seen from a distance, however, it had looked compact, and of a dazzling green hue—like a pot of fresh ferns on a blue cloth. Over it hung a drowsy murmur, which mingled with the plashing sound of water, the cheeping of insects, the sleepy trilling of birds, and the gentle, paperlike rattling of the palm tops as a gentle breeze strummed through them.

Migrating from east to west over the top of the jungle, on the dying southwest monsoon, went a cloud of butterflies, swirling in spirals that were like smoke drifting down wind. The sun was hot, but not oppressive. The smooth sea glittered clear to the level horizon like a vast, burnished plain.

When Gardner was done with his survey, he spoke—aloud, but to himself.

"Why not?" he asked. "Why not?"

Having answered himself silently in the affirmative, he stretched a leg and tapped on the deck with his heel. "Oh, boy!" he called. "Boy!"

"Tuan?"

"Get my things together—you know, into the little trunk and the bags. Everything—understand? I'm going shore side."

"Ai, tuan!"

Presently Dorrance climbed the rail of the quarter-deck and came clumping along toward Gardner, mopping an amiable face with a large handkerchief, and squinting about with shrewd yellow-gray eyes.

"Howdy, Gardner?" he began. "You havin' a loaf? A good thing it is, I'm tellin' you, this time o' day, in these waters!"

"I didn't find it possible to sleep much last night," replied Gardner. "The mate came aboard from that native hotel about midnight, and insisted on singing hymns."

"Dod blast that native hotel!" said the elder man fervently, as he settled himself on a folding stool, his back against the lashed wheel.

"The skipper 'll be showing up soon," remarked Gardner. "In the meantime, have a smoke."

He proffered a cigarette case. Dorrance helped himself.

"Don't especially want to see the skipper," he returned. "Seen him startin' up to pick some mangoes, a little while back. By this evenin', if he eats 'em, he'll have a fine crop o' prickly heat!"

He seemed a trifle downcast, and not inclined to conversation.

"Nice place, this island," ventured Gardner, as if eager to be entertaining.

At that the elder man showed surprising life.

"Heaven!" he answered emphatically. Then, after another short silence, during which he stared fixedly at nothing in particular: "Where you bound for, Mr. Gardner, if you don't mind me askin'?"

The young man laughed.

"For more blue water," he replied. "For skies like this one up top here, and strange people, and queer ports, and—nowhere in particular."

"And Landuan looks good to you?" questioned the other, his tone that of a man who desires to hear a pleasant thing twice.

"Of course, I haven't seen much of it," said Gardner. "Went up the beach beyond the warehouse, and had a look at the boat

beach, and the *barrio*. Found a trail leading north, too, and shooed about fifty monkeys ahead of me. Got as far as that bamboo bridge that crosses the swamp, and scared a whale of a crocodile into the water. It was easy to understand why the ducks up there were fenced in!"

"There's things to see here, right enough," Dorrance asserted earnestly. "You could put in a month fine. More here than you'd think from a few minutes of look-around. Good-sized native village just beyond that bridge you saw. Guess I could find you a good pony to ride—from the plantation, you understand. And if you git in with the natives, there'll be some awful good fishin'."

"I'm heading down for Borneo," explained the younger man. "Want to look around for a few months. I have an idea that I might come across a plantation that I'd like—there, or perhaps in the Straits Settlements."

At that Dorrance gave him a swift look. There was surprise in it, and something like satisfaction.

"Oh, then you wouldn't mind being a planter—hemp or sugar or copra—and staying down in these parts?" he said.

"I like this end of the world," declared Gardner. "I've had a lot of what you might call overcivilized living. I don't care much for it. There were explorers and soldiers among my forefathers, and I think I've inherited their desire to see strange places and unsettled places. Anyhow, I'm going to give the simple life a try—maybe in the British end of Borneo."

"Wish I could tempt you to stop off here for a while," declared Dorrance. "I certainly do! I'm fifteen miles away—right over yonder. Mornin's, when there ain't a haze, you can see me. Over on Tomi, in my sawmill, I cut some of the fanciest cabinet woods and mahoganies that a man ever run a steel saw into. And my power boat's a dandy! See her awnin' stickin' up over there? She's at your disposal, Mr. Gardner, if you'll be my guest for a while. Come ahead! See both islands. You can go on to Borneo afterward."

"You're mighty kind!"

Gardner smiled guiltily. The lumberman did not see the smile.

"Captain Lowther won't care a Borneo clacker," he argued. "Come on! Make it yes, and you won't be sorry—I'll promise that! I'll give you one of the prize months

of your whole trip! And you can go on with Captain Markins when he calls by for copra, six weeks from now. The Maybelle is a neat little schooner."

"Oh, I'd sail in any old tub," returned the younger man.

"You know, you *might* make up your mind to clear a stretch of jungle right here on Landuan," Dorrance continued. "Why, this island produces a hemp that the Gulf of Davao can't look at 'thout weepin'. Light as a Dutch girl's hair—soft as Jap silk. And you know hemp takes mighty little labor to produce—with three crops a year in the good years. The Chink *almaceneros* in Manila pay the highest price for this Landuan hemp."

"Well, well!" said the younger man; but his shifting eye testified to the fact that his thoughts were not on the subject under discussion. After a moment, he added with studied carelessness: "I suppose the girl you were talking to was the Spanish woman who owns the plantation down on the east end of the island."

Those shrewd yellowish-gray eyes suddenly swung their look from Gardner; and Dorrance brought his jaws together in self-consciousness, his cheek muscles rippling where the graying ends of a day-old beard made lighter the mahogany of his face. Then his teeth unclamped to permit him to smile.

"Margarita Quintero," he said, and lingered perceptibly over the name.

"Margarita Quintero!" repeated Gardner. "I like the sound of that name! It gives a person a sort of pleasure just to pronounce, doesn't it? Margarita Quintero! Like a name out of some old romance. Mr. Dorrance, is the girl as nice as the name?"

"Nice!" Dorrance raised one of those freckled hands and dragged at his mustache. "Mr. Gardner, that girl's a wonder! I don't mean just on account of her looks, neither, though she's the handsomest girl in all the South Seas. She's got quality, if you know what I mean. She's a thoroughbred. Comes of it naturally enough, I suppose. Her father was a Castilian—a grandee to the core, and one of the finest men I've ever known. He was an officer in the Spanish army in the old days."

"And the mother, the skipper tells me, was an American."

The lumberman nodded.

"Had good blood behind her, too," he

declared. "The *señora* was educated—had traveled everywhere, and back—could speak all the stylish languages. She was sailing around out here on some millionaire's yacht when Don Quintero met her. Well, the don had no more'n clapped his black eyes on her than he made up his mind she'd never git away. She felt about the same, I reckon. You know, in these latitudes, Mr. Gardner, love don't have to grow. Nope; it comes up ready made, and hits folks just like a typhoon."

"Mm-m!" commented the younger man.

Once more he studied the scenery on shore intently.

"Well, they married," Dorrance went on; "and there was nothin' but love between 'em to the last day of Quintero's life. That last day was just about the *señora's* last day, too. I don't mean she died right away—there was Margarita, you see. She wasn't more'n fifteen at the time, and she needed her mother a while longer. I've always thought that was the only thing that kept the mother alive for another four years. She wasn't sick—didn't have no particular trouble. She just got weaker and thinner—wilted, kind of. The year Margarita was nineteen, Señora Quintero went out."

"And the *señorita*?"

"There's an awful lot of the old don in Margarita. She adored her mother, and she was hurt—bad; but, as I said a bit ago, she's a thoroughbred. She stood the blow like a major; and when she could lift her little black head, she took charge of the plantation. Her father 'd been mighty proud of his place, and she made up her mind it wasn't going to run to seed. She'd been with her father so much when he was bossin' things that she knew the ropes in first-class shape. Well, from that day to this, that girl has run things in great style—hemp, rice, coconuts, everything! Seems to me sometimes that she's about forty jumps ahead of the rest of us planters down here. And how that girl can do things! How she can manage!"

"What a wife she'll make for some chap!" Gardner observed.

The lumberman swung around, his eyes boring the younger man.

"You said it!" he declared, his voice almost choking with earnestness. "Mr. Gardner, you said it! She will!"

His vehemence seemed to embarrass the younger man.

"Of course I saw her just from here," he added hastily. "Not close to; but I couldn't help but think that I'd never seen a Spanish girl with her snap and go. You know what I mean—the way she carries herself."

Dorrance chuckled fondly.

"That's the American in her," he explained. "What is it they call it back in the States? Spunk and ginger. Oh, there's nothing lazy and Spanish about the way she does things! Take this morning, for instance. While Mme. Kolff up at the store—that's the hotel—is keeping in out of the sun, all worked up, you understand, over her yellor complexion, here's Margarita out in a ninety-degree glare, looking after her sandalwood prospects!"

The lumberman grinned with pride.

"While I'm sprawled out under canvas," added Gardner, "dreaming of ice cream and an electric fan on the other side of the world!"

Dorrance went on again, almost as if he were talking aloud to himself.

"If only she didn't have such a big heart!" he declared, with a shake of the old sun helmet. "The don made me promise to keep an eye on her after he was gone, and it's the girl's disposition that's got me worrying."

Gardner gave the elder man a quick glance.

"Not bad, I should judge?"

"Grand!" declared Dorrance emphatically. "Sweetest in the world! Only—well, Margarita Quintero don't do things like most girls. For all her Spanish blood, she's straight about everything—frank as daylight—all her cards on the table all the time. With her, nothing's too good if she likes a person, and she likes pretty much everybody; but some day a crook is going to come along and swindle her. That's what bothers me. She's so much in earnest, and so—so trustful. She takes things so hard when she finds she has put her confidence on the wrong horse—or man."

"Oh, I don't think you need to worry," said Gardner. "If she's got the kind of a head you say she has, she'll be able to look after herself, all right."

Another shake of the helmet.

"I hope so! I hope so!"

Up the companion there came to Gardner's ears the brisk clicking of the lock and brass snaps of his trunk. He controlled a smile.

"The *señorita's* riding togs made me homesick for a horse," he hinted.

Dorrance promptly seized upon the younger man's admission.

"Stay on!" he urged again. "Have a ride around the island with her! She's got half a dozen walers—the only kind of horses that 'll live in this climate. The regular stock from the States die in no time of the *surra*." Then, as a swift *clippety-clip* of shod heels sounded from beyond the long warehouse: "Here comes Margarita now! Watch this end of the shed, Gardner! There!"

II

INTO sight came racing a small, well-formed chestnut. His saddle was of the ornate Spanish variety, with high silver-mounted pommel and cantle, generous sweat leathers handsomely embossed, and hooded stirrups. The bridle that framed the waler's dished face was as ornate as the saddle, being brightly braided, with a tassel of dyed horsehair at either side.

For the lithe, well habited figure of his rider, the pony was rightly proportioned. The two were like one as the chestnut scampered along the wet, hard beach, his head lowered, his nostrils wide, his reddish mane and tail flying like banners. Above him flew another banner—the end of the scarlet puggree. In the wind of the little horse's going, the skirt of his rider's coat was blown back, disclosing the whole length of a strong, round leg.

The men rose, and Dorrance swung the old helmet.

"*Ribut!*" he sang out gayly.

"*Kilat!*" came back the instant answer, and Margarita swung the quirt over her head in a farewell salute.

Dorrance gave a laugh and sat down.

"*Kilat* is right!" he said, with a shake of the head. "She's not a hurricane—she's lightning!"

The sun glinted on the shod feet of the chestnut as he swept on.

"What a picture she made!" exclaimed Gardner admiringly. "And how she can ride! Like a dragoon, by George!"

The lumberman nodded.

"That girl can do anything," he vowed.

"A girl after my own heart!" asserted the younger man.

"Say! D'you mean it?"

Once more those shrewd eyes were boring the passenger of the *Karrakatta*.

Gardner stretched himself out in the hammock again, his hands under his head.

"I mean," he said, "that you don't know what you're doing. If I see that girl again—if you keep on talking about her the way you've been talking—you'll have me off this boat and on the dock with all my luggage!"

Dorrance did not reply to that at once. He continued to watch in the direction Margarita Quintero had gone, and dragged at his mustache.

"Gardner," he said presently, "I've only known you twenty-four hours. Just the same, I'm going to talk straight to you, and confidential."

"Go ahead," said the younger man. "Whatever you may say, I'll respect your confidence."

"Some way I just feel you will," asserted Dorrance earnestly. "I'm a fairly close observer, especially when it comes to business and men. Last night, when we was all chowin' together here aboard the Karakatta, I'll be frank enough to say that I took you in—speech and so forth—pretty close. I'll say, too, that you made a good impression on me."

"Thank you!"

"No, don't thank me. It just happens to be a fact. If I didn't like you, and I figured you might be thinkin' of puttin' your luggage on shore, I'd tell you, and mighty quick, too, that you'd better stay right where you are."

Gardner laughed.

"And I fancy that in such a case I'd be likely to do what I was told," he said. "Dorrance, men with eyes like yours are not to be trifled with."

The lumberman grinned.

"Oh, I'm not what you'd call a hard case," he argued. "Still, I'll admit that I might act rash if the matter happened to concern Margarita Quintero."

"And what you're going to tell me—does that concern the *señorita*?"

Dorrance nodded, grave again.

"Yes," he said, "it concerns Margarita. Mr. Gardner, I've known her all her life. I won't say I love her like a father, because—to be honest—that would be a lie. Guess I won't have to explain just how I *do* care about her, because you—you—"

"Yes, I understand," declared Gardner quickly.

"If I was twenty years younger, it would be a different story," went on the other.

"I wouldn't let you or any other man so much as git a peep at Margarita, as the sayin' is, if I could help it. I'd care for her the rest of my days." His voice trembled. "But I'm not twenty years younger. I'm going on fifty-four. That makes too big a difference in age between her and me—a difference that's all the worse in the tropics. But to go on about the main proposition. Landuan is a small island. It's off the sea routes. Strangers are scarce here, and a good square young fellow don't show up once in a coon's age. Do you see what I'm comin' to?"

Once more Gardner sat up.

"I think perhaps you mean," he ventured, "that you have a reason—after what you've said about liking me—for wanting to see me put my belongings off here."

"That's exactly what I mean—especially after what you've said 'bout being willin' to take a try with a plantation. That means you ain't the kind that would make a decision on anything because you'd see an unfair advantage. I ain't dependin' altogether on my own judgment about you, neither. Last night, when the skipper and me was havin' a smoke together, I asked him about you, and I'll be free to say that he gave you a first-class ratin'."

"I'm glad of that," Gardner answered.

"He told me you was well educated, foot loose, and rovin' around just for the fun of it. He said you was his idea of a gentleman. I got my idea then, Gardner. I put it aside. Guess maybe it hurt me to think of it; but just now it's come back to me. I can see that if I really want to help Margarita, and see her settled like she deserves, I've got to forgit myself."

Gardner put out his hand.

"You're a white man!" he said. "I'm glad I've met you."

When they had shaken hands, Dorrance went on:

"You'll excuse my talkin' so freely, I hope, on such short acquaintance; but the Karakatta sails in an hour or so. If I'm ever to make a move in this matter—well, you can see that I've got to work fast, ain't I? That's what I'm doin'. Since the *señora* died, I've had to take a hand two or three times in Margarita's private affairs."

"She must have plenty of admirers," said Gardner. "She's young, and rich, and so—so wonderfully beautiful!"

"She's had so many admirers they was a pest," replied Dorrance. "First of all,

every soul on this island worships her—except that Koliff dame, and she's yellor with jealousy as well as by blood. As for the white men who anchor in here, they go crazy about her. If you ain't crazy the first time you meet her, you soon will be. Of course, some men don't forgit that she's rich; but all of 'em go dippy. Why, a couple of years ago a lad off a schooner, who was workin' for Margarita, he got so blamed wild about her that he went clean nuts, and I had to shoot him."

"Poor devil!" said Gardner. "And you want to lure me where I can lose my heart to this siren, eh? Well, I'll promise you I wouldn't run amuck."

"Gardner," went on the older man, "some day some chap 'll land here, meet Margarita, and capture her heart. That worries me, because, if he ain't as good as she is—and he ain't likely to be—he'll hurt her sure. Now, then, you got the whole business in a nutshell. It's what's made me gray over the ears. If *you* was to stop off, and if *you* was to like her all right, and—and she was to feel the same—well, you git what I mean, don't you?"

Gardner's brows were knit.

"But the *señorita* is rich," he reminded. "That is, she's richer than I am. Dorrance, I'd like to go ashore here, and get to know her, and—and all the rest of it; but I've got just a few thousand a year. I'm no millionaire."

"Who cares a whoop?" exclaimed the other, with a touch of impatience. "You're not a tramp, are you, nor a beggar? A little money goes a long way 'on Landuan, and you may be richer'n she is, come to that. I know what you mean—you don't want to feel like a fortune-hunter. Well, I'm the one that's put you up to this, ain't I? So—"

The younger man stared down at the tips of his shoes.

"I don't need much putting up," he returned. "As I looked down at the *señorita* from here—well, just her voice, and that slender little figure in a habit, made me feel that—that I'd like to meet her mighty well. And—"

Dorrance reached and grasped the other's arm.

"Say, is that straight?" he demanded.

Gardner lifted a face upon which the red of shyness was darkening the brown of the sun.

"It's straight," he confessed. "You re-

member what you said a little while ago about love—that it hits a man down here like a typhoon? I'm inclined to agree with you on that, because I've—I've already felt the first puff."

Now the lumberman took him by both shoulders, and in an excess of feeling fairly shook him.

"Pack up!" he said. "Go down and cram your stuff into your grips! Scoot!"

He pulled the other to his feet and faced him about. The younger man laughed outright.

"But look here! Wait!" he expostulated. "I'm packed already."

They shook hands then, and solemnly.

"Good! Good! Good!" pronounced Dorrance fervently, as he wrung Gardner's hand in a freckled grasp. "Christopher Columbus, but I'm glad! To-night, before I go back to my own island, I'll mention you to Margarita—oh, just casually. You know how women are. They don't like to have these matters managed for 'em, and she'll like you all the better if she runs into you accidentally. There's no hurry, you know. I'll tell her that you're goin' to spend a few weeks over on Tomi with me. You're just staying on Landuan till I've got my place straightened out for you—see? Don't forget; because our yarns must jibe. She's keen! Come to that, it's true, anyhow."

Looking equally guilty, as well as a trifle embarrassed, the conspirators once more shook hands, after which Dorrance patted the younger man's shoulder approvingly.

"And now, before you change your mind," went on the lumberman, "you git your traps on the jetty, while I go below and hunt a stone ginger from the cook."

"Is there a small bungalow I could rent?" inquired Gardner. "Or do I have to put up at that native hotel, or store, or whatever it's called?"

"That's the place," was the answer. "You can git a good comfortable sleepin' room there, and first-class chow in the bar."

"And the proprietor's a lady, I think you said?"

Dorrance gave a dry laugh and thrust up his chin.

"Her!" he exclaimed. "Guess I'd better tell you one or two things about her."

The person under discussion seemed to be something of a sore subject with the lumberman. He settled in the canvas stool again, willing to delay Gardner's departure

from the schooner in order to impart his information.

"She's what we call down here a *paranak*—a *mestiza*, they call it up around the Philippines. You understand—native mix. Her grandfather on her father's side was a Dutch trader, married to a Javanese girl. Her mother was straight Malay."

"Dutch, Javanese, and Malay," enumerated Gardner, sitting again. "And what's the result?"

"Fine-lookin' woman of the light-brown kind," answered the lumberman; "but a slick proposition, and tricky—say, nobody can ever tell how that lady's goin' to jump! I wouldn't trust her no more'n I would a python, or one of the crocodiles out in the swamp here. There's been one or two awful queer things happen on Landuan, and I'll eat my helmet if she didn't know more about 'em than she'll ever let on!"

"Look here!" interrupted the younger man, laughing. "You don't intend to leave me dependent on her hotel too long?"

"Bet your life I won't!" promised Dorrance. "You got to stay there a few days—can't be helped; but I'll git you away quick as I can, especially if you don't know much about part-natives down here."

"I don't," admitted the other.

"Well, the native may be all right, Mr. Gardner, and the white man good stock; but mix 'em, and what do you git nine times out of ten? I'll tell you—a man or a woman that's jealous of both whites and natives, and ain't either as bad as the one or as good as the other, but somebody that's fightin' both. The half-caste wants to pull down the whites and make slaves out of the natives—wipe out the first, you understand, and exploit the last; but it's a secret war—nothin' in the open, or flat out. If we trust 'em, we're sorry. Warehouses are burned, or the natives egged on to make trouble. It's always the mixed bloods that make the trouble between the whites and the natives. Then, in order to put the trouble down, the whites have to punish the natives. See what I mean? These part breeds play one against the other. They set back and say to us that it's too bad we have to shoot unruly blacks, and they tell the blacks we're cruel dogs."

"And this Anna Kolff is the only mixed blood on Landuan?" asked Gardner.

"Yes," snorted the lumberman; "and take it from me, she's more'n plenty! What do you think she pulled once? Went up

to the don's, just the week after he died, and told the poor *señora* a yarn. Said one of her own Malay mother's great-grandfathers was a chief, and she could prove it, because she had his palanquin right in her store; so she claimed the island!"

"She didn't get it?"

"She got a first-class dressin' down from me," returned Dorrance, not without some heat. "I sent her packin' back home. I told her that all she'd ever get from her white relations was a thinnin' of her brown color—a lighter skin. Otherwise, she was all native. That got her goat proper. Like all her breed, she thinks she's just about pure white, and she's got no use for a real native, no matter how decent he may be. Treats 'em like dirt. They hate her because she's part white, and look down on her. To git even, she runs the ones that are her servants like a bosun out of a collier; but she's apple pie to her bouncer, Kang On. He's a *baba*—that's a Chink born in the Straits Settlements. He's known as a man killer, and was once a sailor. When a ship's in, he keeps his eye on the drunks and brawlers that meet at Anna's. At other times he hits opium, and goes to the mat with it."

"I shan't hunt any row with him," promised Gardner, with a twinkle in his eye.

"It's Anna you got to look out for," warned the elder man. "What you must remember all the time is this—Anna Kolff looks like a white woman. She's been to Singapore a few times, and she puts on white airs; but she's an out-and-out savage—underhanded, suspicious, sly, unscrupulous, wild. Of course, livin' at her place, you'll be obliged to treat her like she was white. Don't ever admit you suspect she's got one drop of color."

"Very thin-skinned about it, I presume," observed the younger man.

The lumberman nodded.

"But that ain't the twist in her nature that's most likely to git a man into hot water," he continued. "Nope! It's this—she's crazy stuck on herself. She makes every one call her *señorita*, same as they call Margarita, and that's how you will have to address her, though she's had a couple of husbands. They hung around until they got scared of her, and then skipped. She's thirty-five if she's a day, and goes on pretendin' that she's twenty; so don't be surprised when you catch her settin' her cap for you."

"I shan't give her any reason to think I'm interested in her," asserted Gardner.

"You won't have to," rejoined the elder man, with a helpless gesture. "My boy, you don't know what you're up against! She'll make your life a burden, if you don't keep out of her way. As I've told you, here's an island that don't see a decent white man once in a blue moon. Well! You come. You're a reg'lar one. And that yellor dame—"

He shook his head.

"Oh, I'm not such a charmer as all that!" expostulated Gardner.

"You don't have to be anything but a new man around the place," returned Dorrance wearily. "She'd flirt with anything that's white. Why, she's even made eyes at me!"

Gardner laughed heartily.

"All right!" he cried. "I'll be careful. I'll tell you what—I'll ignore her. How's that?"

Dorrance joined in the laugh.

"You can't," he asserted. "No, it ain't possible. But here's an idea—git her mind fixed on money. When you come to make terms with her, quarrel with her rates—beat her down. Don't for Heaven's sake let her know you've got plenty of cash!"

"I'll lead her to believe that I'm just a vagabond with a few dollars in my pocket."

"Do that—though she'd take you, probably, if you didn't have the price of a wild banana. You'll be somebody to show off to, and talk to. Git her back up from the jump by offerin' her not more'n twenty pesos a week for board and room."

"I'll be strictly businesslike."

"That 'll crab her! She's one of the sharpest business women between Borneo and the Solomons. Makes the bulk of her money on trade gin. Buys and sells as close as a Cantonese Chink; but she'd be nowhere if it wasn't for Margarita Quintero. It's the hemp and copra the Quintero plantation exports that brings the money in here and puts the island on the map. Yes, siree! Without Margarita, Landuan would be nothin' but a few grass homes in the jungle, and nary a boat in here once a monsoon. But"—angrily—"the cash that the *señorita* pays her natives goes straight into the lap of that almost-white lady. She's got a monopoly on trade goods here. And she sort of queens it—don't serve her bar herself. Oh, my, no! As I said, white airs, but native lazy. Now Margarita's up

and around from sunrise to siesta, and then on until night. The Kolff dame don't put on her own slippers. If they don't go on right, she throws things! And, say, look out for her when she starts to yell in Malay!"

III

ALONG the wharf, toward the gangplank, was coming a long line of *orang-kulis*, or native workers—slight, yellowish brown, barefooted men, wearing turbans and breech cloths. Between every two of them, swinging on a bamboo pole, was a water cask; or a mat bundle of fruit for the cabin table; or a squealing pig trussed with rattan, feet up; or some live chickens and ducks, white heads and red thrust through the sides of wide-meshed baskets as they quacked or cackled and looked about apprehensively.

At the end of the line was walking the Quintero superintendent, Honeywell.

"There's a feller you'll git to know," said Dorrance confidentially. "Good, practical man—knows his business down to the ground—easy to git along with—square as they make 'em, and on the job every minute."

Honeywell proved this last assertion on the spot. He took no time off either for a drink of stone ginger or for introductions. The moment his *orangs* had delivered their loads of stores to the Karrakatta, he threw a leg over a spirited little bay and went careering up a jungle trail.

Gardner followed Dorrance as the latter dived through the companion into the cuddy. While Dorrance satisfied his thirst in a welter of below-deck heat, the younger man distributed some silver to the captain's boy, a Boyanese, and to the fat Chinese cook. Then, whistling to him a couple of Landuan men who were lounging on the wharf, he had his trunk, leather bags, and a canvas dunnage sack brought on deck out of the stuffy cabin.

There, in the midst of the litter of casks, pigs, poultry, and bundles, Gardner found Captain Lowther—a youngish man, immaculate in shore-going clothes, who was not long out of the American Asiatic fleet, where he had been a boatswain. He carried himself, therefore, not with the slouching gait of the average trading skipper in those waters, but smartly and with surety. He had come aboard followed by a native with a basket of bright yellow mangoes. At his command, the Chinese and Malay

sailors tailed on the tackle lines; and as Gardner said good-by and quit the schooner, the last bit of the vessel's cargo was being swung overside.

Dorrance had followed Gardner, and was on the fore deck, chatting with the sleepy-headed mate. He came forward to say a last word to the younger man.

"See you again in a few days," he promised. "Judge it's best to go fairly slow. You know—kind of let things take their natural course."

"I've got a few books along," returned Gardner; "so I'll manage to put in the time all right. Suit your own convenience about coming over from Tomi." Then, reddening, and with a laugh: "Mr. Dorrance, this is certainly the strangest excursion any man ever took in this patch of land and water!"

The lumberman gurgled.

"By crimini, I can't thank you enough!" he vowed.

Again they struck their hands together heartily, and shook them as men shake who are binding a compact.

On the beach, Landuan was just then busy enough; but once Gardner was headed up past the warehouse in the direction of Anna Kolff's place, the island was in its normal, lazy condition. On the sun-baked shingle a few natives were repairing their fishing tackle. Others, hip deep in the water, were casting the circular nets. In the palm grove bordering the sea, half a dozen old women were sitting about, spinning cotton; while naked children, unmindful of the heat, romped in the shade of a big banyan.

Farther along, the stranger came into the copra clearing, where a band of young native women were stripping coconuts, though their chief activity was gossip and laughter. From a distance, with their colorfully handkerchiefed heads, they were not unlike so many sturdy flowering plants bobbing in a breeze. As Gardner passed them, they smiled at him, showing bead-black eyes and glistening teeth. When he had gone by, there was an outburst of merry laughter.

The store-hotel was on a high flat, among palms. Behind the structure was a huddle of native huts, and beyond these a jungle-covered hill. The main building faced the sea, and was separated from it only by a narrow strip of palm-fringed beach. Within fifty yards of the front veranda the gentle rollers came creeping up the shingle.

At first sight the place made Gardner grin. Here tropical nature and an almost Western commercial enterprise combined none too artistically. On the front of a thatched and flower-girt building, whose supporting bamboo poles were overgrown with vines that blossomed in yellow and scarlet, stood out gaudy signs that bespoke the value of various soaps, chocolates, articles of tinware, and gins.

As he neared the store, Gardner could hear, through the half lowered shutters that hung over the window holes, a woman's voice, low and lazy. Except that subdued drawl, there were few evidences of life about the place. A couple of tame monkeys were scampering among the limbs of some ylang-ylang trees, and the swaying branches, flower-heavy, gave off a scent that was delicate, yet oversweet. A Chinese, carrying a couple of tin oil cans across his shoulder on a rhythmically bending pole, was being followed by two white, bleating goats.

Gardner mounted the steps and entered the wide, low-hanging veranda, which was sheltered by far-projecting eaves and carpeted with clean brown matting. On one side bunches of bananas were hanging from the bamboo rafters; on the other were wet and dripping sacks, evidently packed with bottles that were cooling. Scattered about, but in some order, were grass chairs and small tables.

Gardner paid off the men who had brought his effects, then pushed through a lattice door into a large, high-raftered, unceiled room—dark after the strong outside light.

"Mees-ter?"

It was the soft drawl that he had heard from outside.

He looked about him, slowly accustoming himself to the dimness. Across the back of the room ran a long, narrow counter. Behind this the wall was shelved high, the shelves being piled with various kinds of trade goods—bolts of colored cotton, jars of colored candy, knives, glass beads, brass bangles, dishes, tobacco, penny whistles—all out of easy ranch. At one end of the counter, seated in a reclining chair placed close to one of the windows, was a woman, with a table beside her, on which was a tangle of bright ribbons.

"I'd like a glass of mineral water, please," said Gardner; "and a little lime juice in it."

"Bewah!"

"*Mahwan*?" replied a little cheeping voice.

There was the soft *pit-pat* of sandaled feet on the matting. Then over the top of the bar showed the round head of a native girl, her black hair glistening with coconut oil. The head bent. The back of a small brown hand was laid obsequiously against a smooth forehead. An order—in Malay. Then the mistress turned to address the new guest.

"A gentlemans who is come to Landuan in *Karrakatta*?" she cooed. "I glad for sees you. Captain Lowther, he is tell about Americans mans."

Gardner took off his hat.

"Landuan seems such a quiet, peaceful place," he said, "that I've made up my mind to stop off here for a while—that is, if you can accommodate me."

Now he could see her plainly—an oval face, pale and almost bony, the high cheek points stretching the skin tight; a thin-lipped mouth shut in a long, colorless line over teeth which, when she bared them—as she did now, in a smile that was more muscular than friendly—were seen to be under-sized and uneven; a nose as thin as the mouth, with a hump midway of its length; eyes that were shining pin points of black between shadowy lids; a sharp chin; and, under the chin, a neck so thin and crinkled that, more truly than the face, it betrayed the woman's age as past the middle thirties.

But it was the eyes that were the striking feature of her countenance. They peered at Gardner from under a bang of black hair which was too much waved by the curling iron. As he met their look, the visitor recalled what Dorrance had said about the woman. For, like her teeth, they were too small; and they were piercing, and full of guile—a native's eyes.

She gave her narrow brows a quick lift and tilted her frizzed head archly.

"Be ver' nice you stay Landuan," she told him.

"It will be nice," he agreed, "if I don't have to pay too much." The bluntness was studied. "Can you put me up for—er—fifteen pesos a week?"

She recoiled as if from a blow.

"*Wah!*" she cried sharply, as if the bare mention of such a sum had given pain. "Fi'teen pesos! So you knows thees much, eh? Dor'nce, hees tell it to you!" She made one syllable out of the lumber-

man's name. "But here is *no* moneys for *me* in thees price!"

"I mention the sum I can afford to pay," returned Gardner, not looking at her.

She became suave once more.

"Not so much nice mans come for living here—only sailormans, some tam'. Sailormans, maybe hees run off from ships, and hees drinking all tam', gin, gin, gin!"

Across the counter of shining narra wood, Bewah slid to the guest the mineral water and lime juice.

"Well," he answered his landlady, as he took the drink, "you won't have to complain about me. I never drink gin."

She opened her eyes at him, displaying their white.

"But if you no drinks gin," she argued, "how I makes any'ting of profeet because of you stays on my house?"

Then, as if appreciating the fact that she was contradicting herself, she threw back her head with a wide laugh.

She did not bargain further as to the amount Gardner was to pay, but meekly accepted fifteen pesos for the first week.

"And now you *mus*' for stay on Landuan long tam' on my place for eat and sleeps," she declared. "You no can go back in *Karrakatta*. You have pays to me moneys!"

"But I can't stay too long, even at fifteen pesos a week," he countered. "I haven't a lot of money. I'm a poor man, to tell the truth."

She threw out both hands deprecatingly.

"When nice mans like you comes to my place," she returned, "I no cares much for money. Also, you can live cheap like not'-ing, if maybe you likes go for fishes, eh? I buys fishes from you, and you haves fun in boats. I sends two t'ree my mans, and they makes good business for you. Big fishes! Shark! Katong!"

"Katong? What is that?" he asked, as he sipped the drink.

"Ah!" She made an impatient gesture. "What you calls it to 'em? They is for make swell soup. You know—they carries house like this on his backs."

From her black hair she took a small comb of native workmanship.

"Turtle?"

"This is the words, yes—toortle! You catch him plenty. You have big enjoy tam'. And also plenty other thing for do. Maybe you like build traps for leopard cat, eh?"

"Certainly I'll want to hunt; and I'll be glad to go fishing, if you provide the boats and the men."

"Oh, you stays, you likes Landuan," she promised. "And one day I walks with you to natives town. It stands up this way, shore side."

"You're very kind; but mostly, I fancy, I shall be hiring a horse to ride, if I can get one here."

"Ridel!" Her dark lids dropped till her eyes were again only dots of polished jet. At the same time she showed her teeth in what was meant to be another smile. Her face fixed thus, she considered the statement for a long moment. "You hears 'bout that plantation?" she observed at length.

"Captain Lowther told me a good deal about the island," he replied evasively.

"Well!" she said, as if her mind was made up. "Too bad, but at plantation they got ver' much business thees days. They make ready for big five nights feast."

"Oh, indeed! Going to have a celebration of some sort? Then I've arrived just in time, haven't I? It's a native feast, I suppose?"

"Oh, no!" She shook her head decisively. "No native. The lady there, she is engage for marries."

"A wedding feast!" exclaimed Gardner. "That *will* be jolly—though probably I shan't be asked to it. Who's going to be married?"

"You not hear from Meester Dor'nce?" she inquired, with a crafty look in her eyes. "The Señorita Margarita Quintero, shees for marries. All peoples on Landuan knows. Maybe nex' week hees come for marries with her."

"I see!" Gardner averted his look, and became much interested in his glass. "So some one is coming to marry the lady at the plantation, and Mr. Dorrance will come to the wedding!"

She gave a little quirk of a laugh.

"You no understands," she corrected. "Margarita, shees for marry with Meester Dor'nce."

"I wonder if I could have another glass of this?" he asked. "Not to interrupt your conversation, Miss Kolff"—he would not call her *señorita*—"but just now my thirst seems to be the uppermost thing in my life." He laughed.

"Bewah!" the landlady called. "*Lakas pergi meng-ambil-nya!*"

Above the smooth narra popped that small, oiled head, and the glass disappeared.

"Oh, yes, for long w'iles, they twos is in lofe," the lady of the establishment went on. "You see, you stays here. All tam' Meester Dor'nce stays by Quintero plantation. Bimeby hees live up there, and hees ver' rich."

Gardner's second drink finished, the Malay servant showed him to an outside room on the western side of the bungalow. It was an airy apartment, large as to floor space, and high. Almost its entire outer wall was a *kajang*, or window awning, that swung from the top. It contained the usual cane-bottomed bed, a couple of small tables, and a long grass reclining chair. Hanging from the thatch, which was all the ceiling the room had, was a red cotton punkah.

Bewah and another maidservant tugged in the luggage. Gardner unpacked a few of his belongings, then lay down under his mosquito netting; and presently, with a creaking as the punkah cord played across a small pulley, the swinging fan overhead began slowly to wave.

He could hear Anna Kolff drawing out her orders.

"She's a smooth one!" he told himself. "Wanted to see how much Dorrance had told me—tried to draw me out. She thinks they're going to marry, and wanted to see if I'd deny it. Well, I'll never know anything!"

She laughed a good deal, in a forced way; yet she did not succeed in luring him back into the bar. To the snoring of the surf, he slept the afternoon away. Meanwhile the Karrakatta slowly worked herself out from the wharf and caught the soft cat's-paws of the dying monsoon, which lifted her around the western end of Landuan and on her way to Manila.

When he wakened there came to him, through the still evening air, the energetic *putt-putt-putt* of Dorrance's motor boat.

While Gardner rested, Anna Kolff prepared herself for their second meeting. She hid the saffron of her skin under a thick coat of powder, dusted her thin neck till it looked sugared, and plentifully spread those high cheek bones with rouge. Next she deftly shaped her long mouth to a Cupid's bow of scarlet. On her hair, which was more elaborately coiffed than before, she wore some sort of a bandeau. Her dress was of filmy material, in all the colors of the rainbow. Her hands were lavishly

adorned with rings of coral, jade, opal, and rhinestone. Gold wire bracelets tinkled up and down her thin arms as she beautified herself.

She prepared in another way. Bewah was sent to a hill for the white and fragrant blossoms of a certain creeper. These flowers her mistress steeped in water, and to the liquor she added a few drops of nut oil, all the while whispering in Malay a riming formula:

Look, look, loved one!
As this oil drips,
Approach toward me!
Yearn toward me!

She added the dose to a glass of mineral water and lime juice. It was intended for the new guest, and it was a love philter.

IV

WHETHER or not Gardner desired his landlady's company at meals, he was to have it. When he showed himself again, stepping out from under his *kajang* to the west veranda, here was a table set for two. There were flowers on it, and a marvelous caster arrangement containing bottles of vinegar, oil, pepper sauce, and other fancy condiments, the base of the caster setting in a saucer of coal oil, against the visitation of ants.

"You sits here by me for eats," she told him. "It is more better for eats in thees sides of house. Much fresh winds is come from sea. Bewah! Hangor!"

The next moment she was beaming at him. For, seeing no way in which he could avoid accepting her invitation without giving mortal offense, he had taken the chair across from her, the doctored mineral water in his hand. He drank it without mentioning its queer taste. He was not so affable as Anna, but he was hungry enough to put away the excellent dinner brought by the two brown girls.

Rather to rid himself of the society of his hostess than because he needed more rest so soon after his siesta, Gardner sought his own room early that evening; but he could not have slept, even if he had wished to. From where he lay on his sheet-covered bed, under his tent of mosquito netting, he could hear a good deal of loud talk out in the store. The voices carried through the walls, which were only of split bamboo. One of them was Anna Kolff's—now drawling, now shrill; the other was a man's, imperative, unsteady with drink.

"Gin!" it roared. "One more gin! Hear me?"

To emphasize the command, there was the slap of an open hand on wood.

"Sure t'ing!" Anna answered soothingly. "One more gin for Meester Honeywell," she ordered. "I write chits for you, Meester Honeywell."

Gardner pricked up his ears. Honeywell! That was the superintendent from the plantation—Margarita Quintero's head man, and he was drunk in Anna Kolff's bar.

"And she's selling him as much as she can," mused the newcomer. "It's as Dorrance said—she's after the cash!"

He was wakened next morning by the deep, low booming of a distant gong—a gong he had heard just before sunset the previous evening. He spent the whole of the day on the front veranda, sometimes reading, sometimes smoking native cigarettes, at other times talking with Anna Kolff, who—as keeper of a hotel and a store—had many spare moments on her hands.

At his elbow, and without having to order it, he had plenty of cool but odd-tasting mineral water. Anna explained that it was flavored with fruit.

To his elbow, also, were fetched the meals. After months of being confined to the scanty, monotonous fare of a small trader, Anna's menus were welcome. In an air freshened by the breeze from the ocean, and perfumed by ylang-ylang blossoms, he lay back, his ear alert for the tuneful *putt-putt* of Dorrance's bustling boat, his eye out for a galloping chestnut waler.

But neither the lumberman nor the *señorita* put in an appearance. The latter part of the day dragged. Gardner remembered that sweet face upturned to him from the wharf, and wished that he had not promised Dorrance to keep away from the Quintero plantation.

When Anna Kolff was not talking to him, she was gardening—under a pink-flowered Singapore parasol. The *baba* did the actual work. He was a burly Chinese, his cue wound on the top of his head like a mat. Using a huge, hooklike knife, he cut away the heavy growth of blossoming creepers that shut out too much of the air from Gardner's side of the house.

Anna did not speak to Kang On, only pointed with the parasol to where the latter was to trim.

"She's not as lazy as Dorrance thinks she is," Gardner concluded. "He's so de-

voted to the *señorita* that it's hard for him to be fair to this woman."

On the morning of the second day, when he could no longer contain his impatience, and set out for a walk, malacca cane in hand, Anna was just under the veranda, lurking in his path.

"Oh, you go for walk!" she cried. "Good! I go with!"

But Gardner told her that he was not intending to leave the house, not being much of a walker. He wanted to keep out of the sun, he said. Then he changed the subject by asking her about her patron of the previous evening, as if he had no knowledge concerning Honeywell.

"Oh, hees mans livin' up plantation way," she answered carelessly. "He like gin, but hees ver' good mans. He pays me good for what he buy."

Her answer was so vague that Gardner began to see the light. Dorrance had accused Anna Kolff of jealousy. It was plain to her new guest that the part white woman was intentionally neglecting to mention the fact that Honeywell was the *señorita's* superintendent. Was it through fear that the stranger would get in touch with the Quintero plantation?

He turned the matter over as he went back to the west veranda, feeling angry with Anna for waylaying him, and with Dorrance for not returning to Landuan. As he promenaded to and fro, some inkling of the truth came to him concerning Anna's gardening.

"I believe she's lurking outside just to keep tab on me, and to head me off whenever I make a start!" he declared.

So, on his green tropical island, with beaches and jungles to range, fish to catch, leopards to hunt, and crocodiles to snare, Gardner found himself virtually a prisoner.

His books proved to be his solace. When Anna broke in upon his reading, he responded to her remarks politely, but as briefly as possible. He was always so much absorbed in his book that he did not hear her the first time she addressed him. She had to repeat her remarks.

At the end of the fourth day something happened.

So far, the Quintero superintendent had paid a nightly visit to Anna's bar, there to drink his gin and loll drunkenly. To Gardner, he had come to be a nuisance, with his loud talk continuing into the late hours. He had come to be even more—a source of anx-

iety. Dorrance had not mentioned that the *señorita* had any relative who lived with her, or any woman companion; and the newcomer fretted when he remembered that Honeywell, night after night, returned to the plantation half blind with drink, and in a bad temper.

He was in his worst mood that fourth night.

"Whash matter with you?" he demanded of little Bewah, who was serving him. "Di'n' you hear Anna shay she gimme jaw-bone—all jaw-bone I wan'? Han' me over dozshen gin!"

Anna's voice chimed in, low and soothingly.

"Beeg drink, Bewah," she bade. "Beeg one! Meester Honeywell, he have plenty chits."

"Besher life!" returned the superintendent, instantly gratified. "An' you're m' frien', Anna. You're all ri'!"

"Sure, I frien' for you, Meester Honeywell," asserted his hostess. "You drink goo' gin to-night, and to-morrow you make plenty fine work!"

Honeywell uttered an angry curse.

"To-morrow I get fired!" he answered. "Tha' Spanish girl's smart. Can' fool her! Nexsh boat, I get out!"

But presently, the refilled glass in his hand, he was happy again.

"Ten shousand yearsh!" he told Anna, raising the drink in a wavering hand for the toast. "Thash wha' I wish you, Anna—ten shousand yearsh!"

His gayety did not last long. Soon he was maundering and mumbling crossly, his good nature soured by the liquor. At this stage of his spree Anna discreetly withdrew, leaving the superintendent in possession of the room.

He turned to cursing the servants then, asserting his intention to "boot ever' black into the shee!" At the same time he pounded the bar with his fist. Finally, when he had driven the last attendant away, and had the place to himself, he began a floundering start for home.

"Anna's ri'," he declared. "I mush have more money. Margarita don' pay me 'nough wages. I'm bes' shuper'tendent ever worked for plantation. I'm tired of bein' shlave! I'm gon' to house ri' now, an' tell boss I got to have pershentage on profits. Yesh, shir!"

Gardner had not undressed. While Anna had been taken up with Honeywell's

demands for gin, the younger man had left the bungalow and stationed himself at a short distance from it, behind the pole of a palm. A pistol from his luggage was in a handy pocket.

As the superintendent stumbled out of the bar, Gardner was in wait for him, determined to see him home.

It was a brilliantly moonlit night. In the grove the palms laid long, moving fingers of shadow upon the sandy ground. At the ends of the fingers were the shifting spots made by the brushy tops, as an upper breeze swayed them gently.

When Honeywell came floundering among the trees, he dizzily attempted to avoid the moving fingers, picking his way as he staggered along.

"I break m' neck!" he complained. "Never shaw sho many treesh in m' life!"

But he was not heading eastward, toward Margarita's. Instead, he was making northward, straight across the narrow waist of the island, along the path that Gardner had taken on the day when he left the Karakatta for a walk.

"The poor tipsy idiot!" exclaimed the younger man. "He's taking the road to the swamp!"

Gardner had been keeping out of sight of the store, not wanting its proprietor to know that he was following the superintendent. However, as now he started in pursuit of Honeywell, Anna was not watching. She was on the west veranda, just outside of Gardner's *kajang*, rocking in the soft gloom.

The superintendent kept losing his helmet and unsteadily recovering it. He continued to growl drunkenly as he went along.

"Notion never do anosher lick o' work on this islan'!" he declared.

The border of the jungle was like a river of ebon ink. As Honeywell left the grove and entered the zone of blackness, his white riding breeches served to mark his progress to the man in his wake. At times the path was made clearer by the moonlight seeping slantingly into it. Presently, from ahead, two sounds, mingling together not discordantly, came to Gardner's ears—a deep frog chorus, and the high-pitched whine of millions of mosquitoes.

"Good heavens, the swamp!" he burst out, quickening his pace. "He'll fall off that bridge!"

That same instant the white spot which was Honeywell disappeared. Gardner broke

into a run, but held back as he once more heard the other's maudlin complaining. At every step the ground was wetter under foot, while the air was heavy with the smell of vegetation, dank or rotting in brine. Just beyond was the bridge—some bamboo poles, driven into the mud, two by two, like the stakes of an American stake and rider fence, each pair of these holding in their notch a large bamboo foot pole, the whole succession of stakes and foot poles forming a swaggering, primitive bridge.

Drunk as he was, the superintendent was making the shaky crossing in good style. To steady himself as he went along sideways over the ooze and water, he seized the drooping vines and creepers of the mangroves.

"Confoun' moshquitoes!" he fretted, as he slowed up at times to slap his face and neck.

The bamboo bridge had halted Gardner the first time he saw it. Now, however, dark as were some parts of it, he continued after his charge, placing the arch of his shoes over the poles as he sidled.

Both men reached the opposite bank in safety. The moment Honeywell was over, he went forward more rapidly than before, along a way more open than the one on the western side of the bridge. Here the ground had been cleared, and the growth was scarcely two feet high. Where there were patches of moonlight, the folded blossoms of day-blooming plants spotted the shrubbery with white.

The wide path gave upon the outskirts of a *barrio*, the larger of the two native villages of Landuan. Voices could be heard, dogs barked, and the light of small coconut oil lamps pricked out the walls of thatched huts.

The village passed, an upward trending path led the two men toward a point from which was coming the crystal-sweet notes of some stringed instrument, playing a minor strain. The low huts that were the quarters of the Quintero servants next lay scattered across the road. Like some enchanting siren's strain, the music lured Gardner through them and on to a building that loomed against the bright sky. The lower half of the building was hidden by a fringe of low trees and shrubs. Through these one or two dim lights showed, as through netting.

Gardner was close at Honeywell's heels, for there were native voices all about, and

indistinct forms moved from shadow to shadow across moonlit spaces upon which the branches of the trees and the fronds of tall ferns threw a lovely spatterwork.

The superintendent, still going unevenly, circled the west end of the building. Before it the ground fell steeply to seaward. In full sight were the palms edging the beach, with the surf flashing beyond.

The low roar of the rollers was like a bass *obbligato* to that minor strain, clear now, because close at hand. Gardner stopped, the moon at his back, the shadow of a cluster of shrubbery concealing him.

Honeywell staggered another few feet. When he was abreast of the big bungalow, he halted.

"Good ev'n, *señorita*," he hailed, with a wide sweep of his helmet.

Abruptly the music stopped. From the darkness of the veranda came startled exclamations—two women speaking, both in Spanish. Then one voice made itself heard alone, using English.

"Oh!" it said. "Mr. Honeywell, you have been drinking again! I am so sorry! Please go and let Sumpah put you to bed."

It was Margarita, not reproving, only sad.

"Don' wan' go to bed," protested the superintendent. "Wan' hear *señorita* play!"

He lurched forward and seated himself on the front steps.

At that a slender figure in white stepped forward to the edge of the veranda, and again Margarita spoke, leaning over the rail and looking down at Honeywell.

"Oh, where do you get the gin?" she exclaimed sorrowfully. "Not at Anna Kolff's, surely! Anna Kolff promised me she would not sell you one drop. You're getting it from natives! You're ruining the men—you, the man I depend on! And you promised you'd stop drinking! Go to your bungalow, please. I will talk with you to-morrow."

Moved by her gentle severity, Honeywell began to blubber.

"Feel like dog!" he confessed. "Jush like dog!"

The girl shook her head at him helplessly.

"Oh, what shall I do with you?" she exclaimed. "I am ashamed to have Sumpah see you!"

It was then that Gardner advanced into the moonlight.

"Señorita Quintero," he began, "I followed Mr. Honeywell home from—from the beach. My name is Gardner. I am staying at the hotel. I saw him starting by way of the swamp, and—"

"The swamp!" she cried. "It is dangerous even by daylight! We are grateful to you, Mr. Gardner, for taking so much trouble. I cannot thank you enough!"

Honeywell had stopped his weeping. He gravely lifted half shut eyes to the stranger.

"Shanksh!" he added earnestly. "Shanksh ver' mush!"

"I'm coming along to your bungalow for a chin-chin," said Gardner. "Something I want to say to you. Tell Señorita Quintero good night."

He took the superintendent's arm and lifted him to his feet.

"Goo' ni'," obeyed Honeywell, with surprising good nature, swinging off his helmet again.

Having seen Honeywell into his bungalow and to bed, Gardner retraced his steps, stopping again before the veranda to assure the *señorita* that her superintendent was fast asleep and settled for the night. Lamps were lighted now, and a servant was setting down some sort of refreshment, while Margarita Quintero and an older lady were standing together at the top of the steps, waiting for him.

"Mr. Gardner, will you not stop for a few minutes?" the *señorita* asked. "Mr. Dorrance spoke of you." As he mounted the steps, she gave him her hand. "I want to thank you again. You also crossed the pole bridge, and at night! I am sorry Mr. Honeywell put you in such danger."

"It wasn't as bad as that," protested Gardner. "I was glad to do it."

"Mr. Honeywell is a splendid man," she went on earnestly, "when he is sober. He understands his work so well. He is good to the natives, and so faithful to his duties. If only I could stop his drinking! But I cannot find out how he gets the gin; and Anna Kolff can't find out for me. It is some native, of course; or perhaps he gets it when ships come in."

She shook her head mournfully.

"Maybe I can help Honeywell," suggested Gardner. "I can keep my eye on him better than Miss Kolff can."

They had been talking so earnestly, and were so much absorbed in the subject and in each other, that only now did Margarita remember that they were not alone.

"Señora, pardon me!" she cried to the elder woman regretfully. She went to her, taking her hand affectionately. "This is Mr. Gardner. Mr. Gardner, Señora Loyzaga is my very dear friend, and my teacher, and my foster mother, too."

The *señora* understood English, but she did not speak it well.

"I am very glad to see you, señor," she said in Spanish.

She was a large woman of the statuesque type, whose high coloring was emphasized by abundant white hair and handsome dark eyes. After she had welcomed Gardner, she sat a little apart, smiling and nodding as the others talked, but not speaking again.

"You must go back by the beach," Margarita declared, when her guest, having drunk the pineapple cup which was offered, stood up to go. "And you must call on us again. You have come out of the crowded places, but the *señora* and I are much alone here. Now that you are staying on Landuan, you must not deprive us of your society. It will be most grateful for both the *señora* and me to have a visitor—often."

He assured her of his eagerness to come again. Then, having taken her hand once more, and bowed his good night to the *señora*, he went down the slope toward the sea. He was almost as intoxicated as Honeywell had been—but with love.

"Dorrance is right!" he told himself. "It's a typhoon! And it's got me!"

V

THE next morning Gardner managed to get away from the hotel without being seen by his hostess. Under the long, sprawling godown he found Honeywell, looking pale and wan and hollow-eyed.

"Guess I made a fool of myself last night," admitted the superintendent sheepishly. "Gin doesn't agree with me any too well. One drink, and it's all off. Being the only white man around, this place is no joke, day in and day out. I get lonesome and down in the mouth."

Gardner sat down on a pile of loose hemp.

"I don't want to say anything about last night," he replied; "but there's something else I *do* want to speak of. You're a sensible chap—"

"Fire ahead!" bade the superintendent. "I've got some straight talk coming to me.

Margarita Quintero's a first-class employer, and my best friend. I ought to know better than worry the life out of her, and make a holy show of myself before her natives, and—well, give it to me! Shoot!"

Gardner shook his head.

"I don't have to tell you what you already know," he protested. "What I want to mention is something that you evidently don't know. I want to tell you what Anna Kolff is up to."

Startled, the older man opened his weary eyes in a stare.

"Anna!" he repeated. "Why, she's a good sport! She knows she'll get her money when I get mine, of course. But what do you mean, Gardner? Go ahead! Come out in the clear!"

"I will. The *señorita* is anxious about your drinking. She wonders where you get your gin, and asks Anna Kolff to help her find out where you get it. Anna Kolff, strangely enough, for the life of her can't find out!"

"Say!" broke in the superintendent impatiently. "Now what makes you think that? Why, Anna Kolff—"

"I know! I know!" answered Gardner, smiling. "I'm just telling you what the *señorita* told me last night—that she had asked Anna Kolff where you get the stuff, and Anna had declared she didn't know. But all the time—"

"She's giving me credit for it, you mean?"

"Yes, and urging you to drink more than is good for you. Don't you understand, Honeywell, that this woman up here is fooling the *señorita* and getting you into trouble, just to make a profit of a few cents?"

Honeywell grew red.

"She's pulling my nose!" he declared. "I'll tell the *señorita* that—"

Gardner put out a protesting hand.

"No, don't! I could have told the *señorita* all about it last night, but I wouldn't. Not on your account, either. No, I figured out that I'd tell you, and then you could see what kind of a trick was being played. Knowing what Dorrance had said about you, I felt that you could be counted on to give the Kolff lady the go-by when you know how things stood."

Honeywell's eyes narrowed.

"You can bet your boots I will!" he promised.

"If I told the *señorita*," went on Gardner, "what would be the result? Nothing

but mad feelings between the only two houses on the island. Do you see how it is? Anna Kolff doesn't care a hang about the *señorita*—I know that—and she has lied to her; but all the same—”

Once more Honeywell interrupted.

“I see the point!” he declared. “Gardner, you’ve got the right idea. Señora Loyzaga isn’t strong. Oh, she looks strong, all right; but every now and then she has some sort of a sudden collapse, and has to keep still. Gardner, if anything were to happen to her, that would leave just the two women—”

“Exactly!”

“I’ll keep away from Anna’s place,” vowed the superintendent. “I won’t set my foot inside her bar again!”

“But would that be wise?” suggested the younger man. “If you suddenly stop going there, it might make trouble. No, Honeywell, I think, if I were you, that I’d go, but I’d try to be strong enough to pass up gin and drink something soft.”

“You’re right! You’re right!” declared Honeywell. “That’s what I’ll do. Trust me, Gardner! I won’t make a fool of myself again. Anna’s not going to put anything over on the *señorita*, either—not if I know it!”

“And don’t let on that we know each other, or have had a talk,” advised Gardner. “Give me a curt hello when you run across me at the bar, and I’ll do the same to you. Then we’ll get acquainted right in front of her eyes—understand? If we don’t do that, Honeywell, Anna will suspicion that there’s been a little general staff work going on, and she won’t like that.”

There was one person Gardner did tell. That was Dorrance, who came chugging over from Tomi before that same noon. The two men sat down for their talk where they could be sure of not being overheard.

“Didn’t I tell you the Kolff woman was greedy?” demanded the lumberman, almost triumphantly. “Doin’ Margarita a nasty turn for a few pesos! Lyin’ to the girl, too! Well, when it comes to lyin’, she’s got any white woman that ever lived backed clean off the boards!”

He brought out another point regarding the hotel-keeper. The mixing of bloods was a sore subject with Dorrance; he never tired of discussing it.

“These part-castes have childish brains,” he asserted. “There ain’t much doin’ on Landuan, you know; so Anna gits a lot o’

entertainment just out of boozin’ Honeywell up!”

He was glad to know that even the unfortunate, but valid, excuse of having to accompany Honeywell home had resulted in a chance meeting between Margarita and the young stranger on Landuan.

“I’m goin’ to push things along!” he confided.

He left Gardner lounging on the cushions of the motor boat, out of sight under the awning, and started leisurely for the Quintero bungalow.

He came back at a faster gait, almost out of breath, and flushed with heat and excitement.

“Got it fixed!” he cried joyously. “Say, I worked out the neatest scheme! Listen! I told Margarita that Honeywell had to be looked after. I advised *you*. Git the idea? The Spanish don’t make friends fast, Mr. Gardner. It’d take six months to make Señora Loyzaga say yes to your spendin’ a couple of weeks at the house; but you’re to go up, if you’ll be so kind, and live with Honeywell. You’ve seen his neat little bungalow, and he’s got a corkin’ good house boy. Sumpah’ll fetch you your breakfast every mornin’, but you’ll eat your other meals in the main house. Is it a first-rate idea? Huh! I’m tickled to death over it!”

Gardner was equally delighted.

“I’m afraid I shall disappoint Anna,” he suggested.

Dorrance roared with laughter.

“I’m goin’ to break the news to her myself, just to see her turn green and purple!” he declared.

He was so eager for the sight of her discomfiture, and so anxious to have the younger man make the change, that they started for the hotel at once. They were followed by Dorrance’s engineer, Hassan—a turbaned Arab out of a tramp’s engine room—who was to direct the carrying of the luggage.

“I hope this won’t increase Anna Kolff’s ill will toward the *señorita*,” observed the younger man, as they went along. “You know how my landlady likes to make a little money.”

Dorrance ground his teeth.

“If that Kolff woman ever so much as cheeps to Margarita about it,” he threatened, “I’ll tell her a few things!”

Anna did not turn green and purple at the lumberman’s announcement.

“Ver’, ver’ fine for you!” she cried to

Gardner. "That kip Honeywell gone from this side. I glad! Always he want gin! Want more gin! Much trouble for me. Now no more trouble."

She added that the young American would have a "gran" time on the plantation, where there was a wonderful Chinese cook, and many walers to ride, and music—and Margarita. Smiling, she summoned two of her native porters, and sent them ahead with the white men to carry the trunk, bag, and dunnage sack.

"Say!" marveled Dorrance, when he and Gardner were once more out of earshot of the store. "Nicer'n pie! And I thought she'd kill me with one look!"

"She was glad to get off without being blamed for making Honeywell tipsy," explained the younger man, who felt strangely apprehensive. "But, Mr. Dorrance, that woman might do anything!"

He would have felt still more apprehensively if he could have seen the half-caste during the next hour. She shut herself in the room which her guest had occupied. An amazing transformation had come over her face. It was as if her white blood had driven back out of sight, taking with it as it went all sign of the civilized woman; while pushing forward with the native blood came the look of the pure savage.

Like one of the leopards of the island, she strode to and fro, feline, frothing, venting her wrath on Hangor and Bewah, who were called in to clean after the departed. She abused them in fluent Malay, a language perfectly suited to the expression of hatred and insults. She seemed, at times, about to tear them to pieces. She ordered the astonished and trembling girls to wash the walls, using soap and water. From the couch just vacated, and from the matted floor, she bade them wipe up every vestige of dust left by Gardner's shoes; and eloquently she cursed the love philter.

Then, when the brown servants had finished their work and had been driven out, she wept as she walked, her long fingers interlaced across her breast.

"She get him! She get him!" she sobbed. "And I like him for *my* mans!"

There was something else that maddened her almost as much as the departure of Gardner. This was her realization that she herself was the one person responsible for what had happened. She had gone too far in the matter of Honeywell, especially while a strange white man was in the ho-

tel. By giving the superintendent so much liquor, at one and the same time she had lost both her best gin customer and her only paying guest.

"But I am not finish!" she told herself. "Oh, no! I am not finish!"

What she had in mind now assuaged her anger and bitter disappointment. She could even laugh.

VI

ARRIVED at the Quintero plantation, Gardner unpacked his effects in a spacious, airy room made ready for him by Honeywell's house boy, Sumpah, a little brown man with the grave dignity of a rajah. The superintendent, happy at the prospect of having companionship, helped the newcomer to settle. Gardner's books were added to his.

Then the two crossed over to the main bungalow, and entered a long storeroom which ran back from the rear veranda. Here the supplies of the estate were kept—foodstuffs in stone jars; tools of all kinds; coils of rope and rattan; extra lumber; and rows of filled sacks, hanging under the thatch on wires fastened to the bamboo rafters.

As a hint to the visitor that his departure was not a thing of the near future, Sumpah brought Gardner's empty trunk to a small loft which was at one end of the storeroom, at the top of a short stairway. The loft held other trunks, Spanish and American. The Spanish trunks had come to Landuan filled with the don's possessions and Señora Loyzaga's; the American trunks had accompanied Señora Quintero on her yachting trip.

Sharing the loft with them were pieces of furniture which had been discarded, or were in need of repair; also packing cases of supplies which had not yet been opened. From one of these Honeywell took a new saddle, which was to be for Gardner's use. From a packet tied up in rough leaves he produced a quantity of his favorite Sumatra tobacco.

"We'll smoke this up together," he declared. Then, with boyish enthusiasm: "Say, it's going to be great to have you around! Do you play cribbage?"

But Honeywell's happiness was nothing compared with Gardner's. At all times, now, he was to be near Margarita. For several hours of every day he was to be with her, and always in the evening.

He lunched with her that first day of his stay, Dorrance making a fifth at table. Then the lumberman showed him over the main bungalow, which was long and high, with a steep gable roof. Up toward this roof arched the ceiling of the *sala*, or principal room, with almost a Gothic effect. It was sheathed with polished hard wood from Tomi—Dorrance's labor of love.

The great vaulted room was luxuriously furnished. Yellow Chinese rugs covered the floor. It contained a grand piano, a harp that had been Margarita's mother's, a modern phonograph, and a guitar. On all sides were books, in shelves that matched the sheathing. Much of the furniture was of native make, but modern in style. Some of it was beautifully carved or inlaid. The hangings were of silk—from Java and Singapore, from India and China.

The more private apartments were behind the *sala*, on either side. Those occupied by Margarita and the *señora* opened into the wide corridor that gave from the reception room. Those assigned to the house staff of women servants—which included Margarita's aged Malay nurse, Pagi-Pagi—opened upon the back veranda.

Now followed days of new experiences and rare content. Every morning, after his early breakfast, Gardner rode out beside Margarita on a peppery little waler, visiting first one part of the plantation, then another. Sometimes, cantering three abreast, Margarita, her guest, and her superintendent went down the hard beach to the warehouse. If they galloped to the little *barrio* beyond it, and saw Anna seated in her front veranda, the *señorita* waved a gauntleted hand to the storekeeper, and Gardner and Honeywell raised their helmets punctiliously.

The evenings, so full of the enchanting beauty of the South Seas, were made more perfect through the magic of love. It came upon the two young people with the suddenness, and almost with the fury, of a tropic storm, as Dorrance had said. Time was not a factor in it. From the first it possessed them utterly.

One soft starry night, with the *señora* seated discreetly within the drawing-room, busy under an oil lamp with an old copy of her favorite Spanish novel, Gardner took Margarita into his arms. She clung to him, murmuring endearments, uttering little cries in Spanish, laughing and sobbing, and dampening his face with her happy tears.

He whispered his passion to her, and bent her head to cover her face with kisses.

At once there were plans to be made, letters to be written, orders to be got ready for the many things—frocks and hats and dainty garments—which Margarita meant to have from Shanghai and Singapore. A ceremonial dinner was held, to which Dorrance came chugging across from Tomi, with exultant toots of his boat's thin little whistle.

Through the lumberman's urging, it was decided then that the marriage should not be postponed until a wedding outfit could be purchased. Instead, the *fiesta* which Margarita was to give her plantation workers and servants, in honor of the coming event, was to begin at once. The ceremony was to follow in a week, when the lumberman would fetch a *padre* from his own island.

Anna Kolff heard. At once she came the length of the island to proclaim her wishes for the *señorita's* lasting joy. As it was a hot day, and since she had no pony, she came like a rani in the palanquin of her great-grandfather, the chief. Her curtains were tied back, her fan was going. Her four native bearers set her down, and she stepped out, her hands filled with marriage gifts—a girdle made from the fibers of the sugar palm, and a basket of yams.

"These present is old, old custom of my people," she explained.

All of a sudden, she seemed willing to admit her native descent.

"You bet she handed over something that didn't cost her a red cent!" laughed Dorrance.

Margarita chided him.

"The girdle means more to her than money, perhaps," she suggested. "Anyhow, I have all I want, and poor Anna has to work. To be remembered is all I care for."

The *fiesta* was in full swing. No labor was being done on the plantation, but from dawn to dawn drums were beating and bamboo flutes playing for the dance, while the natives feasted on chickens and ducks from the poultry corral in the swamp.

While her people made holiday, Margarita spent the prenuptial hours with her betrothed, wandering along the south beach, where the warm waves came spinning to their feet, or strolling down to the eastern end of the bamboo bridge, along a path winding and turning among flowers—a tropical lover's lane.

And then a saddening blow. Two mornings before the wedding was to be solemnized, Margarita, not finding the *señora* either in the front veranda or in the *sala*, ran to call her at her own door, and tapped upon its wicker panels. There was no answer. Frightened, and guessing at the truth, Margarita opened the door—and there was Señora Loyzaga lying under the high mosquito netting canopy of her bed, smiling as if she were asleep, but quite dead.

As the dread word *mati* went swiftly from mouth to mouth on the plantation, the celebration turned to mourning. On the day following, when Dorrance's motor boat brought the *padre*—a shabby, gentle, round-faced priest, in a flopping hat—the *señora* was laid beside Margarita's father and mother in the little cemetery, which, a riot of yellow and blue blossoms, was in a sheltered glade that opened to seaward on the extreme eastern point of Landuan.

Among the mourners was Anna Kolff. When Margarita returned to her bungalow, Anna accompanied her—and remained there.

Margarita would not listen to Dorrance's plea that she and Gardner should be married that same afternoon. The *señora* had been a second mother to her. She was so shocked and grieved that she could not eat. She was all but prostrated.

Under the circumstances, Anna's presence seemed necessary, for the sake of the proprieties; and so anxious was she over Margarita, and so helpful and attentive to the heartbroken girl, that even Dorrance could not find it in his heart to criticize her. No one but she gave Margarita her food. Throughout the next two nights she sat beside the girl, comforting her when she roused from a fitful sleep to toss and weep.

Dorrance had sent the *padre* back to Tomi with the Arab engineer, and stayed on at the plantation, tiptoeing around the house, peeping in on Margarita with anxious inquiries, helping the hours to pass more rapidly for Gardner.

"Remember what I told you?" said the lumberman. "She takes things so hard! But she'll pull up in no time."

The *señorita* did "pull up." In two or three days she was out in a hammock on the veranda, weak and shaky, but eager to lessen Gardner's concern. About her, day and evening, her little group of friends gathered—Dorrance, pathetically anxious;

Gardner, with his heart in his eyes; Honeywell, with assurances that everything was going well on the plantation; and Anna, all pride over her elevation to the status of companion and chaperon, and ready with gay laughter and banter.

Always near at hand, and jealously watchful, was the Malay nurse, Pagi-Pagi, ancient in appearance, though she was not more than thirty-five, and so frail that she seemed nothing but a skeleton over which was stretched a brown skin traced with numberless wrinkles. Her limbs were like twigs, her hands scarcely more than claws. Whenever the loose cloth wrapping which she wore about her narrow bony shoulders fell to the top of her sarong, her ribs stood forth like a lattice of bent and weathered bamboo.

Her straight, sparse hair was short and gray, and was worn in a perpetual tousel. Her eyes, red-lidded from hanging over open fires to cook Margarita's food, were deep sunk. They were the youngest features in a wasted and toothless face.

As she squatted apart from the group gathered about Margarita, Pagi-Pagi kept those young-old eyes steadily upon her mistress. From babyhood she had tended her charge; and though she was part slave to Margarita, she was also something of a tyrannical ruler, with a devotion that was ferocious.

Anna Kolff affected to ignore her. Once more Anna was playing the part of a wholly white lady who was on her best behavior. To Dorrance she was merely cordial; to her late customer, Honeywell, she was neither distant nor familiar; to Gardner she was polite; to Margarita she was all deference.

But when the lumberman had gone back to Tomi, and Honeywell less often made himself one of the party in the big house, Anna changed. She took to addressing most of her remarks to Gardner. She was playful, teasing. Her eyes and her voice were always full of meaning. She often referred to the days when he was her guest.

Watching her, listening to her, no one, not even Gardner himself, could doubt her infatuation for him. She was constantly finding some excuse to be near him, to talk to him confidentially. In the blunt, outspoken manner of the native, several times—Margarita being present—she mentioned a keen desire to run her fingers through his hair.

He pleaded with Margarita to send Anna home.

"I don't like to have her near you," he declared. "Margarita, she'll make mischief. Besides, you don't need her. Let Pagi-Pagi look after you!"

Pagi-Pagi, squatting within earshot, smoking a native cheroot, nodded her agreement. As the old nurse had been a girl when Margarita's mother came to the bungalow as a bride, she understood English, though she would not speak it.

But Margarita did not acquiesce.

"Until the wedding," she answered, "it is best to have Anna here. Anna at her store may be more dangerous than Anna here in the house. We must not give her a chance to think that she has suffered an affront."

He understood, and was forced to admit that the *señorita* was right.

"Well, anyhow," he concluded, "two days more, and Mr. Dorrance will be back. Then we're away to Tomi, to be married over there!"

That same afternoon, when the two women were alone together, Anna had something to say about men in general, all of it pessimistic. She warned that honeymoons were short. While asserting that Gardner was "a gran' mans," she vowed that she doubted the loyalty of all men. They had, she said, two faces, "one for wives, one for awther lady."

She had time for much argument of this kind; for two days passed, and Dorrance was not back. A blustering wind came up, making a crossing from the distant island dangerous, compelling the planter to put off his coming until a more favorable hour; and while Margarita and her lover watched and waited for Dorrance's arrival, Anna Kolff brought a certain plan of hers to a climax.

She had discovered that Gardner could sing. One evening, as the three sat in the veranda, there being no lights to attract insects from the jungle, she pleaded with him to go inside to the piano. Urged further by Margarita, he complied, and entered the *sala*. Laughing, Anna sprang up and followed.

Instead of going directly to the instrument, Gardner crossed the room to the wide corridor leading out to the rear veranda, where hung wet sacks of bottled ginger beer, cooling. Anna went to the piano and touched a key. Then Margarita heard her

laugh—a teasing, playful, confidential laugh, and a whispered protest:

"No! No! *Please!* *Ai*, you bad boy!"

Next, even as Margarita got to her feet, came the unmistakable sound of a kiss.

A moment later Gardner came back into the drawing-room. As he made toward the piano, a woman's hand stopped him. Taken unaware, knowing it was not Margarita, nevertheless he was not able to retreat, or protest, or free himself from that hand before another hand touched his coat collar—then his shoulder.

At that same moment, more puzzled than troubled by what she had heard, Margarita picked up a flash light that lay on a veranda table, stepped to the sill of the front door, pressed the button controlling the light, and saw Anna Kolff standing beside Gardner. His back was toward Margarita. The woman's rouged face was raised smilingly to his. Her arms were encircling his neck.

The light went out. Violently he thrust Anna from him.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, choking with anger. "Get away from me! Get away!"

Margarita had backed out to the veranda. He went out to her.

"What's this woman trying to do?" he demanded. "Send her home, Margarita! She's a trouble-maker!"

"What you say?" It was Anna, raging as she came out at his heels. "Sends me home, eh? So I don't tell 'bout you!"

"Tell!" he repeated. "You can tell anything that's true—but you won't do that! The truth isn't in you! The first minute I ever talked with you, you told me that *Señorita Quintero* was to marry Mr. Dorrance. You knew that wasn't so! And now you come here to act a lie!"

"I believe that tam' Meester Dor'nce marries like I say," she answered stoutly. "And so *you* believe—when you is at my house. Then you do not drive me away when I be nice to you!"

The light was dim in the veranda. Margarita, in white, with a gay little fringed mantilla over her shoulders, stood without speaking, trembling, steadying herself by a hand on the back of a chair, and looking from one to the other.

"At your house," stormed Gardner, "I kept out of your way, and you know it! I couldn't help eating with you. I didn't want to. If there'd been another place on

the island where I could have stayed, I wouldn't have slept one night at your hotel, where you were urging Honeywell to drink up all your gin!"

Anna laughed coolly.

"Oh, how you is different to me when you knows you will marry to thees plantation!" she sneered. "Jus' now you fin' out you hates me, eh? But you no hates me when you is to my house! Oh, no!"

Roused by the loud talking in the main bungalow, Honeywell had come to his own front door. Out at the rear door of the wide corridor several of Margarita's servants had gathered. Among these was Pagi-Pagi. Anxious for her young mistress, she first drove the other natives from the back veranda, then came darting through the *sala* with the agility of a monkey.

"I've always disliked you," Gardner retorted, "and I've never trusted you. The *señorita* knows I didn't want you to stay one hour under the same roof with her. Mr. Dorrance is right—you're a born mischief-maker!"

Anna shrugged, then turned again to Margarita.

"I spik no more to you," she announced calmly; "but I tells to the *señorita* how you is no good. *Señorita*"—she pointed a long finger—"I tells true to you. All tam' this mans stays by my house, he is *laki*! He is *peng-asih*!"

Gardner advanced to her.

"What's the meaning of that?" he demanded. "Never mind your Malay—talk English, do you hear?" He faced about.

"What is she saying, Margarita? What—"

But Margarita was not there.

VII

THROUGHOUT that night, with the exception of the native children, no one on the Quintero plantation slept. Anna Kolff went home along the beach, her manner that of a cruelly ill-treated person—until she was out of hearing, when she gave herself up to quiet laughter that made her writhe as if in pain. Her scheme had worked even better than she expected!

Every one else, even to the Chinese cooks, was hunting for the young mistress, who had vanished from the dark veranda and could not be found in the house, though Gardner and Honeywell searched every nook of it; nor in the storehouse, where Pagi-Pagi and Sumpah went about with candles and pleading cries.

The grounds around the bungalow were next gone over. Gardner, bareheaded and fairly sick with anxiety for Margarita, as well as anger against the half-caste woman, surrendered the leadership of the quest to Honeywell, who organized it methodically. It was agreed that should the *señorita* be found, whoever had been successful was to beat upon the gong. A certain number of men and women were chosen to patrol every foot of the beach—north, south, east, and west. Others were told off to go into the hemp fields and the groves of bananas and palms; while a score or more beat the edges of the jungles surrounding all the cleared areas.

The night was dark, for the new moon had set, and clouds hid the stars. Each native carried a bamboo rod, into the top section of which was thrust a length of picked resinous rope. Everywhere over the dark island voices called, and jungle border, sands, and rice fields blossomed with flaring torches.

All night long the gong was silent. At daybreak, when the last inhabitant of the Quintero plantation came straggling home, for food and a short rest, there was no good news.

Even before they ate their breakfast, Gardner and Honeywell held a conference. Following it, the superintendent dispatched a flying proa to Dorrance at Tomi, with a note which related briefly what Anna Kolff had done, told of Margarita's disappearance, and asked the lumberman to come without delay.

"He'll feel like killing me," declared Gardner. "He'll wish I'd never showed my face on Landuan. After all is said and done, I'm the cause that's back of the whole terrible thing!"

"Now, don't get into that frame of mind," advised Honeywell emphatically. "And don't accuse yourself to Dorrance. In the first place, you're not to blame. In the second, you've got enough to stand without that sort of thing. Just try to realize that nobody knows Anna Kolff better than Dorrance."

At the early and hasty breakfast that morning, Sumpah avoided glancing at Gardner, and set down no dishes by his plate. The latter was too miserable to notice. His eyes were sunken and bloodshot, his face was a mask of tragic suffering.

Honeywell's grief was scarcely less apparent. As for the Malays who made up

the house staff, they went about on tiptoes. They whispered together fearfully—of the dangers of the swamp, of the leopards that lurked in the jungle: and once more there was heard in the bungalow the dread word *mati*.

The hunt went on without a halt during the great heat of the day. Every inch of the banks of the swamp was gone over, and men forced themselves into the densest parts of the jungle. Even the little cemetery was visited, and the godown gone through; but nowhere in the damp soil of path or forest, field or beach, was found even the print of a slipped foot, or a shred from a white dress.

Toward nightfall, the gong announced the approach of a boat—not the flying proa with its three-cornered sail, but Dorrance, driving his motor boat for the jetty at top speed. From different points on the island Gardner and Honeywell hurried to the wharf. There, discouraged and sorrowful, they awaited the landing of the lumberman.

When the latter came within calling distance, he put his head out from under the awning and shouted to them.

"Found her?" he asked.

"No!" they told him, shaking their heads.

"Put on the best front you can before the old man," Honeywell cautioned Gardner. "He's likely to go to pieces."

Another minute, and Dorrance was beside them. The shock of the bad news, and the strain of having to sit inactive for two hours, had told upon him. His face was furrowed, and his hair startlingly grayer; but he was calm, and far from anything approaching a collapse.

"Any natives missing?" was his second question, as he stepped ashore.

"Not any of our people," returned Honeywell.

"Any of the canoes gone?" demanded the lumberman.

"We hadn't thought of that," answered the superintendent.

Instantly Dorrance sent his engineer on the run to the boat beach to find out.

"You see, Margarita might have started over to me," he argued. He looked the two men up and down keenly—their haggard faces, streaked with sweat and dirt, their soiled and torn clothes; and his glance showed pity. "We won't give up just yet," he assured them. "I'll bet you've done your best; but maybe there's something—

like the canoe, for instance—that you haven't thought of. Anyhow, three heads are better'n one, and I ain't goin' to leave this island till Margarita's found—dead or alive!"

Now Gardner spoke, low and brokenly.

"She doubted me, Mr. Dorrance—I can't understand that. She doubted me on the word of a woman she distrusted. I don't know just what Anna Kolff told her. The Malay words—what were they? Honeywell didn't catch them. None of the servants will admit hearing them; but it was those words that struck our poor girl to the heart!"

"Make up your mind," returned Dorrance, "that the Kolff dame accused you of the worst things she could think of. No wonder Margarita was staggered! Well, we'll find out what was said. Have you looked through Anna's place yet?"

They stared at him and at each other.

"Why, no," answered Honeywell. "We didn't figure the *señorita* would go down there of her own accord, and Anna Kolff wouldn't dare keep her against her will."

"Anna Kolff would do anything!" replied the lumberman. "I wouldn't put it past her to murder the girl, or to git that big Chink of hers to do it."

"Murder!" Gardner and the superintendent repeated the word together.

"If Margarita's dead," Dorrance went on, "it's either that or suicide, and I wouldn't be surprised if it was suicide. As I told you, Gardner, the girl takes things terrible hard, and here's two blows close together—the *señora's* death, and this trouble. But if Margarita's been killed, it's Anna Kolff!"

"We'd better get a coast guard in here," suggested Honeywell. "This may be a case for the authorities."

Dorrance gave a strange laugh, reached back under his coat, and pulled to the front of his belt a big, pug-nosed holster.

"I'm the authorities," he said significantly, "and I'll do the lawin'. It won't be no kid-glove business, neither—even if Kolff is a woman. Nobody's goin' to raise hell with Margarita Quintero and git away with it!"

Dorrance's old helmet was off. He shook it viciously, as if it were Anna in his hands.

"I'm goin' up there now," he declared. "I'll make her talk her damned Malay! Come on!"

He led the way past the godown and up through the palm grove to the store. At the approach of the three, the *baba*, who was busily cutting at the vines growing up the east veranda, disappeared into the bar, hooked knife in hand, and slammed the door. When the lumberman tried it, he found it locked. He put a shoulder to it and forced his way in.

Kang On was behind the bar. As the trio of white men crossed the room, making for a door which led to the private part of the building, the burly Chinese got in their way.

"What you come for catch this side?" he demanded.

No one answered. Dorrance did not even trouble to draw his revolver. Lifting a freckled hand, he planted an open palm across the full face of the Celestial, thrusting him back so powerfully that the latter fell sprawling. On the hardwood floor under him there clattered a creese.

"Watch that bird when you get by him," cautioned the lumberman, over a shoulder. "If he makes a move, plug him! He'll never be missed."

But Kang On, except for raising an alarm by a series of falsetto cries, made no further effort to stay the advance of the white men. Instead, he crawled under the bar and stayed there.

Behind the barroom was another—a sort of accounting room or office. Here Hangor and Bewah were discovered. Screaming in terror, they ran down the wide hall from which the bedrooms opened, out by a back door leading to the rear veranda, and away.

"That's the last of them," commented Dorrance.

He began methodically to open one door after the other, going from side to side along the wide hall. After trying several, he came to one that had its bamboo latch fastened down. He promptly took a knife from his belt, slashed away the rattan hinges of the door, and pushed the whole framework inward. It gave way, swaying crazily on its fastenings.

Before the three men, silhouetted against the square brightness of a window opening, was Anna Kolff. Her mouth was wide with astonishment, her eyes were glaring. As the lumberman crossed to her, far from retreating or showing fear, she held her ground, her whole body twitching like the body of a cat preparing to spring.

Dorrance wasted no time.

"Where is Margarita Quintero?" he asked, his tone level and low.

She turned back her thin lips in a snarl of hate.

"Margarita Quintero!" she mocked. "You thinks, maybe, I carries Margarita Quintero over thees place in toe of my shoes? For that you come for busts down my house, eh? Say you wants Margarita Quintero, you goes fin' her!"

Dorrance turned to the other men.

"Stay and watch," he bade. "I'll be back here in a minute."

He went out, and began a search of the premises, with much slamming and banging and no sparing of kicks if a door failed to open readily. While he was gone, neither Gardner nor Honeywell spoke, even to each other. They waited, silent and watchful.

As for Anna, she still jerked convulsively, and her fingers curled and uncurled like the claws of a cat. Venom was in her look, and she kept up a running fire of shrill exclamations—all in Malay.

Presently Dorrance came back. He stalked over to Anna.

"You're goin' to cough up the truth now," he said. "If you don't, I'll tear this whole place down level with the ground. Hear me?"

Her right hand darted to her breast, slipped between the folds of her dress, and fastened upon the butt of a small pistol.

"You hurts my house," she replied, "and I kills!"

Dorrance caught her wrist, drew the hand and the revolver into sight, twisted the weapon out of her grasp, and flung it across the room.

"What did you say in Malay last night to the *señorita*, after you laid your yellow hands on Mr. Gardner?" he demanded.

"What I says is trut' about Meester Gardner," she answered. "I says how, before he go to bungalow, he not pays me for all them days here."

Before Gardner could deny the charge, Dorrance started forward, seized the woman by the shoulders, and shook her—so violently that the powder on her face scattered in the air.

The other men seized Dorrance, dragged at him, and succeeded in setting Anna free.

"Your temper's got the best of you," asserted Honeywell.

But the lumberman, though breathless, had himself thoroughly in hand.

"Oh, no, it hasn't!" he contradicted.

"This dame's a savage, and all she can understand is rough handlin'." He faced her once more. "That's a poor lie you told just now," he went on. "Before I show up again, you'd better decide on the truth. You ain't goin' to play horse with me this raffle—understand?"

He wiped his hands on the sides of his coat, as if the very touch of her had been unclean.

She had reeled back out of his grasp. Now she stood, drawing her breath sobbingly, and smoothing her hair, which had been shaken down about her shoulders.

"I know what 'll make you talk," he continued, with a smile so pleasant that it was sinister. "I know what 'll take some of the yellin' hellery out of you, too! Get me, eh? *Chabok!*"

She cringed.

From outside rose a shout:

"*Ai! Ai!*"

It was the Arab engineer, summoning Dorrance. The latter picked up his helmet, which had fallen to the floor, and gave Anna a nod.

"You'll see me again, madam!" he promised.

The Arab was standing among the palms a little way from the store. As he caught sight of the three men, he ran toward them, excitedly calling out his news.

A small outrigger canoe was missing.

VIII

"THEN did Margarita put out to sea alone?" asked Gardner. "But she didn't like the sea—she was afraid of it, and of boats."

The lumberman was puzzling over the information.

"If she started for Tomi," he returned, "your proa would have seen her this morning, or I'd have seen the outrigger on my way here this afternoon. She must have started for False Natuna—that's a big island to the north; but it's twenty miles from here, and there isn't anybody on it at this time of the year, except maybe a few pearlars."

"In this short time she hasn't been able to get far," declared Gardner hopefully. "We can come up to her quick in the motor boat. Let's get down to the jetty, Mr. Dorrance, and start."

The other shook his head, and pointed at the sun, which was now balanced on the watery horizon.

"Night's too close," he answered. "Time's too short before dark."

"But if we make in the direction she took," urged Gardner, "we could call out, even if we couldn't see around us very far, and we could blow the boat's whistle and show a light. She might hear or see us, and answer."

"Let's hurry to high ground first," advised the lumberman. "Honeywell, you brisk ahead with Hassan, and he'll give you my glasses out of the boat. We'll go above the bungalow and take a good look to north."

"Perhaps our proa will have some news for us when it gets in later," suggested Gardner, as the superintendent started in advance with the Arab.

"Proa ain't comin' to-night," answered Dorrance. "It stayed over because the *padre* wants to come in the morning, and it 'll fetch him."

A bare quarter of an hour later the three men were standing together on the highest point of Landuan, in the short second growth of what had been a clearing. Gardner and Honeywell were looking through the latter's glasses, turn and turn about; the lumberman was steadily scanning the ocean through his own.

As they climbed to the lookout place, the sun had slipped below the rim of the world. Already the light was poor; and upon the water stretching to northward they were able to make out no speck that might be a boat.

It was time for the monsoon to shift. As they stood there, intent upon their examination of the waves, a growing restlessness became apparent in the air above the point. The leaves and fronds about them began to stir, and clouds lifted into sight toward the northeast.

The lumberman lowered his glasses and looked about him.

"A jimmycane's comin'!" he declared.

With troubled eyes the three marked the increasing of the breeze, the forming of sullen swells on the darkening sea.

"It's the new monsoon breakin' on us," Dorrance decided. "If we could only have had another calm day! But it's here, and we'd better start back."

They made homeward, but they had gone only a short distance when with incredible swiftness and ferocity the first blast of the storm broke upon them. Jagged bolts of lightning rent the somber skies, thunder

boomed, and the wind, which was at their backs, came with a terrific blow.

For a little it eased, as black night shut down. Then it swept upon them once more with almost overpowering force. It was like a solid, though invisible, wall. It laid the shrubbery level with the earth. It all but hurled the three men flat.

Next, borne by the hurricane, came the rain, descending in smothering sheets that drenched them as in a bath, deluged the ground under their feet, and beat upon the wind-flattened undergrowth of the hillside. Through it, deafened by the tumult of the tempest, clinging to one another for support, they reeled like tortured things.

Presently they were under the lee of both the hill and the jungle, and among dense and heavy growth. Now, though out of reach of the hurricane's fury, they could not see the white helmets they were grasping in their hands. Their trail was a noisy stream. The leaves over their heads were no protection. As the rain came thrashing upon the branches of the trees, they poured upon the tottering men the load of water tumbling from the skies.

But Honeywell guided his companions successfully; and finally, gasping for breath, beaten to a stooping posture, with their clothes streaming, all emerged into the clearing behind the servants' huts scattered in the rear of the main bungalow.

Here they found the menservants running about among their houses, their naked bodies glistening in the downpour. Having taken no precautions until the storm was upon them, the natives, with a great babbling and yelling, were working at securing the thatch frames over their huts, and lashing down the *kajangs* against the walls of the little buildings.

Round a corner of Honeywell's bungalow to the front veranda the gale swept the three white men. When they entered the porch, under them formed pools of water, which ran spreading over the matting. Their clothes hung upon them in heavy, wrinkled soddenness. Their helmets were soggy. Their faces stung from the lashing of the rain.

Sumpah came running with a light, and the three gazed at one another; but they were not thinking of themselves. Was Margarita Quintero somewhere out in the storm, on the water or on the land?

Dorrance was the first to speak.

"A boat couldn't live a minute in the

sea that's runnin'," he said gloomily; "but if I knew she was out there—if we'd caught sight of her canoe—we'd start after her, and trust to luck to ride through it!"

Gardner's face twisted in a sudden spasm.

"It's no use to talk of going out to hunt," he returned despairingly. "If she was out in a canoe when that storm broke, she never stayed afloat."

"Never," agreed the lumberman. "The breaking of the weather—just supposin' she did start for False Natuna—well, it means the finish; but I can't believe she took to the sea. Oh, I know it looks bad. There's that missin' canoe not accounted for; but let's not decide it's so till we know it is, because maybe we're all wrong. Honeywell, go into your chests and see if you've got something dry that 'll fit me."

Soon all were supplied with pyjamas and slippers, and were drinking a hot brew. Supper followed. They ate little, and that in silence.

Outside, the storm raged as if fighting to destroy the bungalow. The *kajangs* all had been drawn down and lashed securely, so that the three men were as snug as if in a box; yet the air was drafty, and now and then harassed the low-turned lamps, so that they flared, smoking. Every now and then the rending lightning lit up the bungalow, the blinding light entering through the basketlike walls under the overhanging verandas. In such instants the shivering lamp flames became puny yellow spots in a blasting brilliance.

Above all other sounds was that of the floods which were rolling down the hillside, swirling and sucking under Honeywell's bungalow, and to either side of it, over red earth too saturated to receive more water. A steady accompaniment was the swishing of the rain on the wet thatch. From the distance, in an undertone, came the sullen boom of the wind as it combed the low-bending palms, and tore at the top of the near-by jungle, almost drowning out the boom of the sea. Added to the wild symphony sounded the deafening crashes of thunder. They seemed to vibrate up through the earth. They were like the threatening of direful things yet to happen.

Leaving the supper table, the three men slumped into grass chairs, drawing a little comfort from their pipes, and talking by fits and starts of the storm, of Anna Kolff, and of the lost Margarita Quintero.

"She never did anybody a mean turn in all her life," Dorrance told them. "And here this is done to her! Anna Kolff was mortally jealous of Margarita—her youth, her good looks, her friends, everything; but most of all jealous of you, Gardner. I wish to heaven that I'd brought you straight up to Honeywell's here the day you landed, and never given that half-caste a chance to speak to you! But now it's done—can't be helped. Terrible thing, all of it—terrible!"

Gardner leaned forward to Honeywell.

"Did you notice," he asked, speaking as low as possible, "how Sumpah acted at supper—toward me, I mean? Never looked at me, and didn't offer me one dish. She put 'em down on the other side of Mr. Dorrance."

Honeywell nodded.

"Yes, I noticed," he admitted. "I've come to the conclusion that the feeling against you among the natives is pretty general. Oh, nothing to worry about; but I fancy they blame you for the *señorita's* disappearance—not understanding the real state of affairs."

"That's where you're wrong!" broke in the lumberman. "The natives know Gardner didn't carry Margarita away. No, it all begun before Margarita left. It's Anna Kolff again! She got into Margarita's house, where she had the best chance in the world to work on the servants. She could whisper to them against you, Gardner, in Malay. And trust the servants to spread it!"

"In the morning," said Honeywell, "if the storm lets up, I mean to call together every native on this end of the island, and say a few things. Shan't mince my words, either. If I let matters ride without a check, there's no telling how far the *kulis* would go. They have to be handled firmly, I tell you."

"You're right!" concurred Dorrance. "These natives never analyze an idea, or go behind it. They're like a rooster followin' the point of a stick. They git set in a certain direction, and just keep on till they run amuck."

"Noticed something else," went on the superintendent. "This morning, when we were coming in for breakfast, Pagi-Pagi ran across our trail. As we passed her, the old lady spat at Mr. Gardner."

Dorrance whistled.

"Spit, did she? Well, it's high time to

switch their dope and start 'em spittin' at the right person!"

The two younger men were worn out with strain and grief and lack of sleep, but neither would go to bed. They slept in their chairs. Dorrance stayed awake throughout the night, smoking and staring at the lamp, at his companions, at the shadows on the walls. All the while he was turning things over in his mind, and nursing his rage against Anna Kolff.

Sometimes, his voice drowned by the storm, he muttered aloud.

"You think I was rough to the Kolff dame," he told the two who were fast asleep. "Say, you don't know what rough is! I won't take you into my plans, and have you bust 'em up; but I swear that if that dear girl ain't back safe in her home this time to-morrow night, I'll find a way to make Anna tell me what she knows. Yes, and I'll have her beggin' to talk!"

IX

UNTIL the early morning hours the new monsoon drove against the island without lessening in fury; but its first onslaught was abruptly over before dawn, and the sun shot up into calm and sparkling air. However, a wild sea was running. The whole of Landuan wore a collar of white spume, while offshore shoals were now revealed as patches of seething breakers.

At the first approach of light the three men were on their feet. They ate a hasty breakfast. Dorrance, after the wetting of the night before, was suffering twinges of rheumatism. He stayed behind with the superintendent when Gardner, glasses in hand, started up through the dripping jungle, to study the sea once more.

"Go ahead, if it 'll make you feel any better," he told the younger man.

"I've got to do something," Gardner answered. "I'll shout if I see anything."

The gong was sounding a call for the coming together of the plantation's natives. They gathered in the open space between the main bungalow and the servants' huts. Their heads were lowered, their looks averted, their manner dogged.

The superintendent spoke to them briefly, asking for no reassurances.

"You who are under my feet!" he began. "I have seen the distemper against the young stranger, and all because of the words of the hooded snake. You do not know a fish's eye from a pearl, or green

stones from jade! Your mouths still taste of your mothers' milk! You have not even a half-face acquaintance with this gentleman! Therefore let none raise his voice against him, or make any stirring up of evil works, lest the face of that one be blotted out from among us forever! You have heard?"

"Ya, tuan," they answered respectfully.

"A boat! A boat!"

It was Gardner, calling from the hilltop.

Honeywell's cry answered him, and the assemblage sent up a wild shout of hope and relief. Dorrance came rushing out of the smaller bungalow, his aches forgotten. He joined the superintendent, and the two plowed their way up the muddy slope, behind them streaming the natives.

Gardner met them halfway. He was trembling so violently that he was incoherent. Dorrance took the glasses from him, but, the hilltop again gained, the lumberman's hand was so unsteady that he could not use them. It was Honeywell who made out, to eastward, in the ruddy glow which the sun was laying on the rough seas, some dark object afloat.

It disappeared into the deep furrows of water; but he held the place where it had gone, and a moment later he saw it again as it broached up on the near side of a falling swell.

"Outrigger!" he cried.

The three were like so many madmen, surrounded by natives even more frenzied. Dorrance was the first to recover himself sufficiently to think of sane procedure.

"Honeywell, you stay here," he directed, "while Gardner and I go out to the canoe. Keep pointin' to it, and that 'll give me the true course."

"Wave if you find her," Honeywell called after the lumberman, for the latter was already half running, half sliding, down the hill.

Gardner shouted back a promise.

Hassan had the power boat in the lee of the jetty's curve. The stretched awning was down, and the Arab had swathed his charge with a covering of tarpaulins. He was in the cockpit under these, busily tinkering and petting his engine.

Feverishly Dorrance began to strip the stern of the boat.

"To sea!" was all he said. "To sea with her!"

In amazement Hassan stared out at the boiling waters, then at his master.

"Ya, tuan," he responded dutifully, nevertheless.

With Gardner helping, Dorrance began turning the head of the boat so that it would drive straight into the heaving swells outside the beach surf. Hassan took his place. The engine began to sputter.

Covered with canvas, Dorrance and Gardner sat in the stern sheets, Dorrance with the wheel in his hand, his helmet under one foot. The boat began to lift on a swell, pointing her nose skyward. Then she dived forward over a crest; and as her stern was lifted out of the water, her propeller raced with an angry whirl.

She smothered her nose in the next swell, slicing it with a great double splash, and shuddering from stern to stern. She seemed about to founder; but again she lifted bravely, shook her head, and as before plunged forward.

The tarpaulins were still lashed over the whole forward part of the boat, and far enough astern to cover the engine. Though she shipped the seas that came over her bows, the canvas shed it like the back of a frigate bird, and none of the brine reached Hassan in the cockpit.

Dorrance and Gardner were buried in spume, and had fairly to gasp for breath. However, they took no thought for themselves, only straining their eyes ahead.

"Do you believe that any one could live in the boiling stew that's out there?" asked Gardner.

"We'll look," answered the lumberman grimly.

The boat was plunging like a runaway camel. Gardner held to Dorrance, to keep the older man in his place, and steadied himself by clutching the hand rail that ran around the inner side of the gunwale.

When they were well into the thick of the heaving seas, Gardner, between downward plunges, twisted his head and saw Honeywell standing on the high point. Behind him, forming a background, were the natives of the plantation, motionless. Honeywell's white-clad figure stood out against this dark wall of humanity, his white arm pointing toward the speck in the distance, like a weather vane.

Gardner corrected the direction of the motor boat's head. Dorrance shifted his helm. Now they were running in a straight line with Honeywell's arm, across the long, deep furrows of the waves.

"If she went out in this canoe," Gard-

ner said huskily, "she was trying to get away to Tomi."

The lumberman shook his head.

"Not Tomi," he answered. "Not to my island. No, remember that that canoe's been driven by the wind to southward all night. That means it came from the northward—from toward False Natuna."

Half an hour of struggle, and they were close enough to the outrigger to see that it was floating upright.

"It takes a lot to overturn one of these native craft," declared Dorrance, his look glued to the boat ahead as it came into sight. "One would almost have to hang to the outrigger and push it under water while a cross sea was runnin'. Gardner, if she went out in this canoe, she's still here!"

Of a sudden they were within arm's length of the outrigger. As they rose on the breast of a wave, both men, white and shaken, half rose from their seat to stare down into it. It was empty.

"Thank God!" Gardner dropped back. "It got adrift before the storm, Mr. Dorrance. We'll find her yet! She never was near this canoe!"

"You're right!" agreed the lumberman. "You're right, and I thank God, too!"

As the motor boat came alongside the derelict, he pointed to a bit of bright fabric which was caught in a sharp splinter of the rattan whipping of the outrigger.

"But what's that?" he asked. "Look!"

The cloth was trailing under the water. Bending toward the canoe, Gardner caught at the soaked material and drew it out.

It was the gay little fringed mantilla that Margarita had been wearing on the veranda two evenings before!

X

BOTH men uttered a despairing cry. After that, while the motor boat tossed about, bowing boisterously to the swells as she met them, having just enough way to keep her breasting them, Dorrance and Gardner held the square of embroidered silk between them, looking at it dumbly.

Of a sudden the older man burst into tears, letting his chin sink to his breast.

"She's gone!" he wept. "She came out in the canoe, and she's gone down. Oh, poor little girl!"

Gardner, sorely stricken as he was, found himself comforting the other.

"Dorrance, what a wonderful friend you were to her always," he reminded the older

man. "You never failed her. Look what you've done for her all her life! Don't take it too hard."

Presently the lumberman quieted. He lifted his hand in a signal to Hassan, and the boat made a quick turn, heading for home. Behind them, drifting onward and away, went the canoe.

On the hilltop, Honeywell, watching through the glasses, understood that the news was bad. At once, to anticipate any evil results when the people of the plantation learned the worst, he turned abruptly upon those behind him.

"To work!" he commanded. "Each man will return this hour to his labor. Off with you!"

Puzzled, wondering, but obedient, the islanders hurried away down the hill; and before the power boat reached the jetty, they were in the hemp grove and at the copra clearing. For another few hours, at least, trouble was averted.

Honeywell cantered to the wharf, to meet the motor boat and to hear of the finding of the mantilla. Dorrance and Gardner joined Honeywell there, and stood with him, each holding to that bright shawl, silently turning and examining it, while the mantilla and their clothes, drenched after the trip through the plunging seas, steamed in the hot sun.

"The *padre* is coming," announced the superintendent presently.

The others turned. Scudding toward them from the direction of Tomi, its three-cornered sail well laid over to port under a light wind which had sprung up out of the northeast and was strumming through the palm tops, was the flying proa.

Dorrance nodded.

"I guess," he began slowly, "that first thing to-morrow mornin' we'd better hold a little service for the *señorita*. You'll let all the people know, won't you, Honeywell?"

"Yes," Honeywell answered, not above a whisper.

At that Gardner broke down.

"I can't give her up!" he told them brokenly. "And I won't! She isn't dead! Don't give up! Oh, don't, for God's sake!"

It was Dorrance's turn to give comfort. He patted Gardner on the shoulder.

"Why, Gardner, I don't want to give up," he said helplessly; "but it's about all we can do. Come, boy! This won't help none. It'll just do you up. Get hold of yourself now. There! There!"

"I suppose," said the superintendent, "that if we accept the *señorita's* death as a fact, I'll be able to look to you, Mr. Dorrance, for orders concerning work on the plantation. Of course, I'll stay as long as I can be of use."

The lumberman nodded.

"Stay," he replied. "Carry on just as if the *señorita* was alive. If she's gone, why, of course the property belongs to her kinsfolk, whoever they are. Naturally, till they take it over, we don't want the place to go to rack and ruin, and it soon would if we didn't keep an eye on the natives. I don't know who her relatives are. I do know the *señorita* used to git a letter now and again from a city called Valladolid, in Spain. When the *padre* gits in, we'll all go up to the bungalow and look through her papers, to git some line on things."

Then he swung around to Gardner, standing bent like an old man, the sea water dripping from the rim of his soaked helmet.

"And after services in the mornin'," he added, "you better come over to Tomi with me."

"It isn't easy for me to think of going," objected Gardner. "I've been so happy here with her, and I don't feel she's gone!"

"She's gone," insisted the lumberman. "You can't do her any good by stayin' on. On the other hand, if you stay, it might mean trouble. Of course, Honeywell's got the natives in hand just now, but later they may act up—against you; and you've suffered enough."

"You've suffered, too," reminded the younger man. "I don't want to add to your worries. I'll go."

"I'll let the natives know that you're leaving," said the superintendent. "That will stave off trouble."

"I'll send my luggage down to the motor boat to-night," answered Gardner.

"And you won't be far from Landuan," argued Dorrance. "So you'll be able to hear any news, good or bad, that Honeywell gits. Markins 'll be along in the Maybelle soon, and if you want to, why, you can go on to Singapore."

When the *padre* landed, he looked more forlorn than usual, for his shabby clothes were wet, while his hat flopped about a face white and anxious. As he shook hands silently with the three, he gave each a keen, hasty look. Gardner's face was the face of a man who had just looked down into an open grave. Honeywell was stunned. He

stared over the *padre's* head as if he scarcely knew where he was, or why he was in that particular place. Dorrance, whose wet cheeks were beginning to blister with the sun on them, had lost all his sad expression, and looked irritable, quarrelsome.

"I'm not going to talk religion to you," the *padre* said to him, "so don't glower at me, Dorrance. I'm going to mention certain possibilities."

"Oh, I know you, *padre*!" answered the lumberman. "You're as wise as they make 'em, and you're goin' to try and chirk us up; but you can't, because little Margarita Quintero's gone—gone for good. I'll tell you why I think so. In the first place, for all her Spanish blood, she's one of your regular American girls. Wasn't no round-about business with Margarita. She come right straight out with everything. Well, then! The bungalow was hers, wasn't it? If she'd put any stock in what the Kolff woman said, she'd have told that half-caste to git, and Mr. Gardner along with her. Instead, what did she do? Disappeared, just as if into thin air! That means one of two things—either she went clean off her head, and drowned herself, or somebody found her wanderin' around delirious, put her into that canoe, and set her adrift to drown!"

"She never took her own life," declared the *padre* stoutly. "Hers was a firm and beautiful faith. I, who have been her adviser all these years, know better than any one else just how absolute was her belief."

"*Padre*, I tell you, I know!" continued Dorrance. "I been acquainted with the *señorita* since she was a baby. If she was herself, she'd have had too much spirit to drop out and leave the place. She'd never confess herself beaten and let anybody, least of all that Kolff woman, stay top dog. No, *padre*, she's been gone almost forty-eight hours, and that means she's done for!"

Once more there was silence.

Presently the *padre* faced toward the island, dazzlingly green after its fierce washing, and all aquiver in the heat. He let his look rove it from end to end.

"It's a small island," he observed thoughtfully. "You can't very well misplace on it a girl who doesn't weigh a hundred and twenty pounds. Still, that's just what's happened—for I can't believe she went out in any canoe. No, that slender little figure is here somewhere—somewhere

that nobody's thought to look. Let's think. Let's use our imagination. Old chests—hollow logs—abandoned shafts—caves! Are you sure that there aren't forgotten clearings up in the jungle, partly overgrown, with old native huts in them? Or she might be under a boat." He spread out both arms. "She's here, and we'll find her!" he asserted emphatically, and added reverently: "We must trust in God."

After luncheon, gathered in the vaulted *sala*, the four men looked over Margarita's papers and letters—documents which reminded them painfully of their loss. For here were Honeywell's monthly reports, recent messages of advice from Dorrance, fond little notes from Don Quintero to his daughter, treasured through the years, and others from Margarita's mother.

Letters from Valladolid, and a number from different cities in the United States, gave information concerning those who were bound to the *señorita* by ties of blood. In a silver-inlaid box, saved preciously, as if it were a jewel, was a pressed flower that had been on its stalk but a bare fortnight before. It was a blossom picked for her by Gardner.

It was long after the siesta hour when the trying task ended. Then the men scattered—Honeywell to ride his rounds of the plantation; the *padre* to make a search on his own account, and to do some questioning; Gardner to pack his belongings, when Sumpah had fetched his trunk down from the loft, and afterward to pace once more, with a sick heart, along the winding path where he had walked those few deliriously happy times with Margarita.

As for Dorrance, he volunteered to escort Gardner's belongings to the motor boat, and see them safely stowed. The luggage got together, he followed the servants who portered the trunk and other baggage. He had his own reason for wishing to get away by himself. He had a certain important duty to perform.

The plantation left behind, the saddened lumberman gave place to one who was grimly determined. Once more there came into his eyes that dangerous glint; again his jaws clamped together till they jutted out from under his graying mustache. As he trailed the natives, he chewed at a sliver of palm leaf. By turns he was red and pale. His lumpy and warped helmet was pulled far down. He kept muttering to himself savagely.

"The best a man can say of that mongrel dame is that she's played a mean game," he rumbled. "Now, after raisin' the very devil, she expects to be treated like a woman. Well, if she thinks she can hide behind a civilized petticoat, she's awful mistaken! Ha-a-a-a! I'll show her somethin'! *Chabok!*"

When the house boys had set down their loads and turned back through the sun toward the bungalow, the lumberman strayed into the long godown and began hunting through it. At its western end, up under the thatched eaves, he found what he was seeking—a long lash of crocodile hide, as wide and thick as a man's thumb, fastened to the end of an ironwood stock. It was a whip that Honeywell kept in case of emergency, for it was an effective weapon against a Malay running amuck. The lash was wound around the stock, so that Dorrance, as he sauntered up toward the store, appeared to be carrying a cane.

As he reached the palm grove, one of Anna's woman servants spied him. Instantly she scuttled out of sight into the house.

At that Dorrance began to run; but Anna was too quick for him. Before he reached her front veranda, she was in flight up the slope behind the store, her white-shod feet pattering swiftly along the trail to the bridge over the swamp. Dorrance, puffing and sweating, halted in time to see her disappear into the dense shrubbery that was the beginning of the jungle.

"Good!" he roared after her. "Good!" And to any who might be listening within the building: "Two can play at the drivin' out game! Let her try the jungle for the night! Let her see what it is to be without shelter! Ha-a-a-a!"

On Anna's rear veranda he sat down, the whip across his knees.

XI

As Margarita slowly awakened, first of all she became conscious of a rank, sweetish odor that made the oppressive heat still more unendurable. Lying with closed eyes, she inhaled the odor a few times, puckering her brows over it, puzzled, and a little troubled. Then her lips moved silently.

"Why, it's—it's like opium!" she told herself.

Her lids felt weighted. Presently, rousing a trifle more, she dragged them up. She found herself looking into the dark. Her

arms were stretched on either side of her. Her head was on a pillow. She was resting on a soft bed.

By degrees her eyes became accustomed to the gloom. As she continued to stare straight up, she made out, not the shining ceiling of narra wood that bent above her own bed in the bungalow, but—seen only faintly in the shadowy place—a sloping thatch, ribbed with bamboo.

She was startled, and for the first time stirred, lifting a hand to her breast.

There was an answering stir not far away, and the sound of a long hiss—apparently a cautioning signal.

Once more Margarita lay quiet; but she strained to see more of what stretched overhead, and what was about her. By turning her eyes slightly, she discovered that, low down, a stream of light no deeper than the width of a finger was flowing into the place. It entered at the juncture of floor and eaves, and was directed slantingly upward against the roof thatch.

By this light she was able to see that she was in a room full of large, dark objects. What they were, she did not know. Puzzling more than ever, she lifted a hand to her forehead. She found that her face was damp with perspiration, and the hair falling about her brow and throat was wet.

"I'm thirsty," she declared aloud.

The watcher was squatted in the darkest corner, on welter knobs of heels, with all toes widespread, and knees hugged up. At the complaint, there was no movement, not even the drawing of a breath; but through the dim light looked eyes that were like drops of black molten metal.

Margarita waited a moment, then slowly raised herself to a sitting position. She felt weak and dizzy. She waited again, propped by both arms, until the swimming in her head lessened. Now she saw that she was on a bare and musty couch. About her were packing cases and trunks.

"Why, I'm in the loft!" she exclaimed.

The watcher swayed on those leathery heels, but made no answer.

Beside the couch was a trunk lying on its side. On the trunk was a white cloth. Margarita touched it. It was damp. Beside the cloth was a glass half filled with a brown mixture.

She took up the glass in a hand that shook. "It is opium!" she declared.

At that, swiftly, and with a cracking of old joints, the watcher, without straighten-

ing, came scuttling across the floor, like some queer, gigantic crab.

"Soft! Soft!" warned a cooing voice, speaking low, and in Malay.

"Pagi-Pagi!"

"Comfort and gladdener, be tranquil," soothed the crone. "Sleep yet again, excellent and illustrious!"

Smiling into the girl's face, the old nurse half rose, with her knees bent, and, putting forth those clawlike hands, pressed her charge gently backward.

"No! No!" Margarita resisted, though feebly. Then, using the Malay tongue: "Why am I in the loft?" she demanded. "The sun leaks in. It is not night. Why do I sleep—and why here?"

"Radiant one," replied Pagi-Pagi, "thou hast been ill—oh, most pitifully ill. Lie back as before, greatly beloved. Rest! Grow strong! Gain new courage!"

But again Margarita would not obey.

"Why am I in this place?" she persisted. "Reply! I command!"

"Beautiful," said the old woman, "thou hast been given to drink of the flower which builds dreams."

"And for what reason?"

"Because, treasured one, thou wert ill, as I have said. Thou couldst not stand, but fell sidewise upon me as I led thee toward thy bed. When thou hadst drunk of the liquor, then was it very necessary that thou shouldst sweat the evil out through thy skin; so thou wast brought here, where the floor smokes with the heat—brought for thy dear body's sake."

Tilting herself forward, the nurse laid twisted fingers upon Margarita's forehead.

"Ah, the sweating has worked rightly," she went on, in a calming singsong. "Thou art cool, like the leaf of the mango in the morning. There is no burning!"

The girl stared up at her, half doubting, half believing.

"And how was I borne thither?" she asked. "Who brought me?"

"Several, tinkle of bells! They bore thee as in a sling—Sumpah, Balar, the yellow-haired, Daud, and Lagu. But rest longer, breath of my body! The blood of the poppy makes thy blood thick! Repose! Repose!"

Pagi-Pagi again squatted, her sharp thighs balanced on her heels.

Margarita only sat the straighter.

"How long am I here?" she continued. "An hour? Though that may not be, since

I last remember the night. But how many hours? Say it!"

"Delicious as the taste of durian in a dusty mouth, thou hast been in this place as many nights as thou seest my fingers before the jewels which art thine eyes."

The old woman spread all her talons, holding them up.

"Ten!" Margarita was aghast. "Oh! So long!"

In that same moment she looked down at her clothes. Her dress was the white one she had been wearing that last-remembered night.

"Pagi-Pagi, I have on this white garment which I wore when I became ill—the very one! How does it come? Have I lain so long in this one garment?"

Those shining black eyes fell before the searching look of the young mistress.

"Of what moment is the peel of a fruit," she returned, "if the meat of that fruit be sound?"

"Do not evade!" Margarita was stern. "I guess at foolishness here, and perhaps worse! Answer me exactly—where is he to whom I am pledged?"

"The young white lord?" Pagi-Pagi pretended astonishment at the question. "Blood of my very heart, he is gone."

"Gone? Oh! And how long since?"

"Two nights, and two more," asserted the old woman.

As Margarita sat, trying to realize the full significance of what she had been told, Pagi-Pagi, balancing herself lightly, swung backward and forward gently, her deep eyes playing over the pale face of her mistress.

"So long?" breathed Margarita. "And where went he—to Tomi?"

The tumbled gray head was shaken.

"Not to the island of ironwood," was the answer, "but toward where the sun shows itself after its night of sleep. Fine down of little birds, the American lord departed, not in the small, white-roofed canoe that speaks with harmonious puffs, but in a mammoth proa; and he does not return."

Again the eyes like inky molten metal traveled the girl's anxious face; but Margarita was beginning to guess the truth.

"False words!" she asserted. "Wicked and deceiving words!"

"Fair and open words," returned Pagi-Pagi. "All who were tormenting thee have departed. The woman of two bloods sped off instantly—Sheytan possess her! And the man, he knew he was too evil for thee,

oh, budding flower! The seller of sawn wood bade him go—likewise thy head man, and the holy teacher that is a Nazarene."

"More false words!" was Margarita's comment. "Oh, I know it! He whom I love—he witnessed how much evil could be thought of by the half-caste; but I—I have been utterly in the power of a whole native whom I dare never trust again!"

"One dear past all reckoning, be not displeased with thy slave! I—"

Her mistress halted her.

"I have unrest of your babbling," she said angrily. "Your acts have been evil. This place, this dress, my shoes still on my feet—all make me aware of it. You have brought confusion on me and those dear to me; but I will have no more fraud!"

Pagi-Pagi's old eyes began to drop tears.

"All thy days have I followed thy tiny white feet," she wept. "Sour plum I may be, yet love for thee, fragrant as an herb, is engraved on the very kernel of me! Ai! Ai!"

"Waste no more moments!" bade Margarita. "I will have the true explanation, or else"—she made use of an old threat—"I shall depart from Landuan, and never more shall you look upon my face!"

The old eyes grew stone-hard now. The wizened face puckered in hate.

"Corrupt is the white lord to rottenness!" she charged. "The woman of two bloods has said it, the people of Landuan know it. When, hearing what shame had come to thee through him, thou didst sink down, I caught thee up in my two arms, thus! I bore thee up these stairs, and couched thee here, and gave thee of the dark drink, for a long sleep. Only Sumpah knew."

"A-a-ah!"

"More!" The hag's voice grew shrill. "For I made the evil one suffer, as he had made thee suffer. I put thy shawl upon the wing of a canoe, and shoved the boat from the land. He found it, and believed thou hadst perished; and now he goes!"

Margarita held up her hands in horror.

"This you have done to me!" she cried.

"The woman who cradled me, who professed to love me as a mother! While I lie helpless through the poppy, you have tortured him whom I would wed!"

"Promises made under the moon are not binding by day," answered Pagi-Pagi. "Now thine eyes are open. Little mouse, he is not for thee!"

Summoning her strength, Margarita got to her feet.

"Help me to go," she said.

She leaned, swaying, against the overturned trunk. Pagi-Pagi did not move.

"Thou art sick as ever," the old woman said sullenly. "Thou must stay another night."

"You disobey? You refuse aid?" Margarita stared, scarcely able to comprehend. "You are crazed!"

She made as if to go. Like a spring straightening after pressure, the native woman was up, and had planted herself in the girl's path. With her half-bent knees and stooped back, she scarcely reached to Margarita's elbow.

"Stay one other night!" she implored.

"No!"

Those brown twigs of arms shot out. There were steel wires under their wrinkled brown skin. They encircled the girl, lifting her clear of the floor, and swung her back to the couch, tumbling her upon it.

Margarita stared up, wrathful and horrified at her servant's boldness.

"Jealous and base!" she cried.

Pagi-Pagi was scarcely less appalled at her own act. With a muffled cry for pardon, she prostrated herself.

"*Ai! Ai!*" she wailed. "Now let them scrape my hollow in the hill, for a blade hath pierced my heart!"

She rocked herself, hiding her face.

Again Margarita rose, on the farther side of the couch. Anger gave her strength. Without again speaking to the kneeling Malay, she hastened to the head of the short stairway, and descended.

As she set foot on the rear veranda of the bungalow, she saw, straight before her, and just entering the shrubbery where the path led down past the *barrio* to the swamp, the bent-shouldered, white-clad figure of a man. She knew him. Half blind after the gloom of the loft, weak after lying so long, and still somewhat dizzy from the drug, she could not follow him swiftly enough to come up with him.

"Hugh! Hugh!"

Her voice was faint. He did not hear the call, but kept on. As fast as her strength would allow, she followed, going unsteadily. At the *barrio*, a few who only a moment before had reviled Gardner as he passed, saw her and fled out of her way. She did not stop to reassure them, but hurried on.

Behind her mistress, her rheumy eyes streaming with regret, her flat breast heaving with dry sobs, came abjectly that sack of bones which was Pagi-Pagi.

When Gardner reached the glade, he walked more slowly and lifted his eyes to look about him sadly, lingeringly.

The air was mellow. From the wild garden flowering in riotous abundance rose a mingled perfume. The jungle, walling the winding path at a little distance on either hand, was freshened and sweet after the heavy rain. Out of it came the happy twittering of birds; and down from its top, like brilliantly colored leaves blown on the languid breeze from the northeast, sailed gorgeous butterflies.

Where a thick clump of bamboo shoots made a bend in the trail, Gardner halted. Ahead of him, drawn aside a few feet out of the way, was a woman seated on a lava rock, her back toward him, her eyes gazing steadily toward the bamboo bridge. In one hand she was holding a revolver.

She heard him, and leaped up. It was Anna Kolff, her face pallid around the spots of rouge, her eyes bulging with fear, her body tense. For an instant she seemed undecided whether to attack or to flee. Then she relaxed, put away the weapon, and surveyed him curiously.

"Meester Gardner!" she said presently. There was sympathy in the tone. "Thees is first tam' I see you since Señorita Quintero, shees run away. Say, you looks ver' sick! Poor mans! And I sorries for you! Sure I do!"

He gazed at her dully.

"What are you doing here?" he asked. "And with a pistol?"

"Dor'nce!" she answered, and her shoulders heaved with quick anger. "Hees come for go after me! I fin' out, so I runs. S'pose he come all the way here, I shoots him!"

Gardner made no comment. His arms hung listlessly. His body sagged in his rumpled clothes. He was like a man in a half stupor.

"Maybe you think I make some of your troubles," Anna observed, something like pity in her little eyes. "Oh, Meester Gardner, I got more sorries about it. I hopes you 'scuses—yes?"

He lifted both hands in a gesture of hopelessness.

"Nothing matters any more," he said. "Nothing—now that she's gone!"

"Oh, shees gone all ri', for all tam'. No mans fin' her no more. Too bad! But— we bees good frien's, Meester Gardner?"

She came a few steps nearer.

"Friends," he repeated.

The word gave her no hint of his feelings, for his voice and expression showed neither hostility nor any sign of cordiality.

"For you I bees always frien'," she went on. "I likes for help you all tam'."

"I am going away from Landuan," he returned.

"Oh!" There was keen disappointment in the exclamation. "You go? That ver' bad news for me! I likes if you stays. You can stays all tam' my house, Meester Gardner."

He shook his head.

"No?" Then, with an attempt at playfulness: "You lives ver' nice and lazy on my house. You stays one day—two day. If you likes, you stays year—two year—long tam'."

He smiled at that.

"Oh, you not laughs!" she chided, and again came nearer. "You bees ver' happy." Then, pleading earnestly: "First tam' I sees you, I likes you. I likes you bees in my house. Jus' now you sick—broke-hearted; but bimeby not so much, maybe. All whiles I good to you, so you likes me. That nice! And maybe some-tam' you marries with me."

He stared, amazement in his look.

"Yes!" Anna went on. "And bimeby you and me, we got Landuan Island. Honeywell goes, Dor'nce goes, nobody comes. Here stays jus' you and me."

His stare grew more fixed. A strange set grimace on his haggard face made him seem to be smiling again.

Anna's smile enlarged, softened. A swift, feverish red added itself to the rouge on her thin cheeks.

"I got awful wish for have you," she confessed huskily. "All tam' you stays on my house, I not sleep good jus' for think lofe 'bout you. I stays by your door, for watch you—like dogs. That's why I says Dor'nce marries with Margarita—I lofe you, I likes for marries you. Tha's why I gets mad when I sees you go for stay in plantation."

Gardner nodded.

"I know."

Her pleading tones became passionate.

"My heart, shees break when I fin' out you marries Margarita," she went on.

"Oh, I cries, cries, cries! But now, if you not got Margarita, you come by me—please! You bees my 'usban'! Come! Come back along my house! Oh, yes!"

"You keep out of my way!" he answered quietly.

Up jerked her head. Her eyes opened, her teeth snapped together.

"So!" she cried.

He went on, speaking in a low voice and deliberately.

"Margarita Quintero always treated you well. You repaid her with mischief. You drove her to her death. You hated her—because she was so good and beautiful, and because every one loved her. You think you'll drive her people away, and take this island; but you're mistaken. Mr. Dorrance will see about that!"

"Dor'nce!" she echoed, and spat. "Ha-a-a! Maybe you likes for try drive me away? You is boss to Landuan, eh? You marries thees island, no, and sends me into sea? Ho, ho, ho! This island, shees fine and rich! Shees belong my people since before Don Quintero comes! Ye-e-e-es! Jus' so!"

He laughed.

"You'd be all right if you didn't pretend to be something you're not," he told her. "Everything that Mr. Dorrance told me about half-castes has been proved true by you."

That stung and affronted her.

"You thinks you ver' smart because you got all wite blood, eh?" she taunted. "Ha-a-a! But not so smart you thinks! The Quintero girl, shees fool, too! And Honeywell, hees *beeg* fools! Also Dor'nce! I makes Honeywell drink gin, and hees no good for work. That makes plantation no good. Shees not got such lots money!" She tossed her head in triumph. "Tha's why I sends him back drunk—when I can!"

He gazed at her steadily for a moment.

"I don't think you've been able to do much harm," he asserted. "You do a lot of bragging, but that's about all. I'm even beginning to believe that you didn't have anything to do with the *señorita's* going. You think you did—or you like to say you did; but you're just bragging, like the Malay that you are!"

That brought the desired boasting.

"Yes?" she questioned. "Yes?" Then, with an outburst of laughter: "Oh, you s'pose maybe you marries her to-day, eh?"

She turned to point toward the brown, muddy waters of the morass, high above normal as the result of the deluge of rain. "You go for look-see in swamp. Maybe shees walk in there. If you finds her, you marries with her—alonga frog fella and crockadilly! Ha, ha, ha!"

Gardner shuddered.

"No, Meester Gardner, shees want for marries with you, but shees not get you. I say to you how that is. When you goes in room, at Margarita's place, I goes. I talks nice words, like I was talk them to you. She can hear them words. What I do after? This! I make kisses on my hand—so—and so—and so!" She kissed the back of her hand repeatedly, with raucous laughter, like a parrot's. "Margarita, shees thinks you kisses me! Ha, ha, ha! Two of you is fools!"

"So you kissed your hand! That's what happened! You tricked the *señorita*! You talked to yourself, and she thought you were talking to me!"

"I does much more! You says to me I bees Malay. All ri! Too bad you not understan' them Malay words, Meester Gardner! It bees good jokes what I says to Margarita Quintero! I says to her, 'Whiles Meester Gardner bees on my house, hees *peng-asih* to me—lofer! Also hees to me *laki-ver* good 'usban!' Ha, ha, ha!"

"What devilry!"

Gardner fixed his eyes on the woman's thin and crinkled neck. Across its powdered surface dark spots seemed to be darting—small, round spots, the size of his own finger tips. The spots came and went. They existed only in his own mind; they seemed to be inviting his avenging grip. As they danced like huge flies, their antics were so strange that he could not help grinning.

That grin was like a lash to Anna. He saw an astounding transformation come over her face—the changing of the civilized woman into the savage.

"I glad shees go!" she cried in a frenzy. "I hope shees die! I like for sees her *mati*!"

His fingers began to twitch again. The round spots that were like the prints of his own finger tips swung in wider circles.

"I kept Dorrance from hurting her!" he said aloud. "Now I'm ready to kill her myself!"

"Hugh!"

The voice was close behind him. It was low and faltering.

"My senses are playing me another joke," he added.

Nevertheless, as if to see one who could not be there, he turned.

"Dear Hugh! I heard her. It's all right. I never believed her. Oh, Hugh, how ill you look!"

XII

It was more than a vision. It was the lost one miraculously come back, in her white dress, with her soft hair falling about her young shoulders. She was hardly an arm's length from him. She was pitifully pale, and she swayed weakly on her slippered feet; but her hands were held out to him, and her dark eyes were brimming with happy tears.

A choking cry, and he caught her in his arms, straining her to him, and trying—deliriously, rapturously—to tell her his joy, which was beyond words to tell. She clung to him, her cheek against his, and murmured little comforting endearments.

Struck dumb with astonishment and dismay, Anna Kolff stared at the two, standing there with heaven about them. Then, as her malign brain began to work again, she saw this meeting of Margarita and her lover as a white trick. The *señorita* had been hiding behind the bamboo—planted there to hear Anna foolishly admit her love for this man, more foolishly plead for his return to the hotel, and—worst of all—lay bare her schemes against the white girl.

Her yellow face twisting in loathing of them, the corners of her long, thin mouth bubbling with froth, Anna began to scream at them in Malay, cursing them with horrible curses, reviling them with all the unspeakable phrases learned from native sailors, spitting at them.

They did not heed her. To take Margarita beyond the sound of the tirade, Gardner caught her up in his arms and carried her past the bend in the path, and on out of sight.

A crouching figure darted past them, going toward Anna—Pagi-Pagi, who had heard all and understood all. The old nurse had two duties to perform—to wreak a just vengeance upon the hated half-caste enemy of the *señorita*, and to redeem herself in the beloved eyes of her mistress.

Anna saw the bounding, tousle-headed old creature. Her vile speech failed her.

A look of wild consternation supplanted the expression of rage on her distorted features. With a gasp, she turned toward the bridge over the swamp, and fled.

The other woman went leaping in pursuit, her beady eyes red with lust to kill, her shriveled legs and arms flying like pistons.

To Anna, the bamboo bridge seemed the one avenue of escape. She sprang upon it, bending the first pole of the string to the very level of the muddy water. She stirred the surface of the morass as she caught desperately at the pendants of the mangroves, for support, and swished them back and forth in the flood.

Like a monkey, Pagi-Pagi scuttled in pursuit. Anna could make her way but awkwardly in her stiff American shoes, being compelled to go sidewise along the poles. The crone, her bare toes spread fanlike over the rounding tops of the bamboo, to grasp them in the prehensile fashion of the native, moved swiftly along, balancing herself with her wiry arms as adroitly as a tight-rope walker.

Anna realized her danger. When the old woman was almost upon her, she paused, reached into the front of her dress, brought out the pistol, and fired.

The shot boomed against the walls of the jungle. The corralled ducks sent up a loud quacking. Margarita and Gardner, at the edge of the *barrio*, halted and exclaimed, wondering and frightened.

But Pagi-Pagi only showed her gums in a wide smile. The bullet had gone wild, passing through the swinging creepers over her gray head; and Anna, in her excitement, had dropped her weapon into the swamp. The half-caste turned in panic to resume her flight.

To halt that flight, the old woman leaped to the same pole upon which Anna was standing, not only bending it with their combined weight till it swagged into the water, but making it spring up and down by swift jerky movements of her old body, so that her enemy could scarcely manage to keep upright.

Anna screamed—this time in terror.

"Mother of witches!" she raved in Malay. "I shall flay the skin from your bones! Bringer of sickness! Evil-eyed! Accursed!"

Pagi-Pagi had her turn at speech. She took full time for it, and spoke low.

"Eater of pig!" she answered. "All your life has been set upon spoiling the joyousness of my adored one—even beginning when she was yet so tiny that she rode upon this old back of mine; but all things come to an end! Daughter of Sheytan, prepare to drink of the slimy ooze wash till thy breath is stopped by it! And then, foul blend of foul bloods, prepare to give thy ill-humored body as an evening meal to the lords of this salt pool!"

Anna's bony face was white without powder, her eyes were glazed with horror.

"Mercy! I, too, am Malay!"

Pagi-Pagi chuckled.

"Ha-a-a!" she replied. "You are white when you would do evil! You are white when you beat and lash your Malay workers! But now that you meet Malay wrath, you are Malay! You are brown when you would save your reptile life! Carrion, I must believe only one of these things, and I choose to believe what you have boasted for the whole of your stay on Landuan. White you are, but soon you shall be truly brown—brown as the brown murk around your feet!"

Then Pagi-Pagi leaped, seized the other with both hands, and thrust her sidewise, loosening her hold of the drooping vines.

Shrieking, as she lost her balance, Anna grasped the old woman. Together, for a moment, they bent to one side, vainly tried to straighten, then went down.

As they disappeared, a shower of dark brine ascended, to sprinkle the bright green of the mangrove streamers. The thin ooze under the bamboo stringers boiled as the two women, in their desperate struggle, lashed it into a chocolate foam.

Another moment, and the boiling quieted. A pair of clawlike hands rose above the ripples, and caught at the bridge. Next an old head appeared, shaking the water from its gray hair. Then Pagi-Pagi laid her ribby breast across a pole, and drew herself up till once more she stood clear of the swamp.

Below her all was still again. Her sarong hung heavily about her skinny shanks. She looked down at it, and marked its state. With a grunt of satisfaction, she faced homeward, and, agile as a monkey, capered her way to the end of the bridge.

"Ha!" she laughed. "Now have I a fair excuse to ask, before the marriage, for a new length of bright cotton!"

THE END

